THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY PANTAGRUEL:

THE FUNCTION OF GROTESQUE AESTHETICS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

NEMANJA PROTIC

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN ENGLISH

YORK UNIVERSITY

TORONTO, ONTARIO

May 2015

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines whether *the grotesque*, an aesthetic form associated with the carnivalesque literary mode and commonly seen as aesthetically and politically subversive, can resume its function within the contemporary context in which carnivalisation of everyday life is a frequently noted aspect of capitalist culture. Locating as its primary image the human body in the process of often-violent deformation, this study explores this problem by theorising the grotesque as Janus-faced: existing on the boundary between the Symbolic and the Real. As such, I argue that the grotesque is: a) deeply related to cultural attempts to challenge hegemonic structures, even as these challenges become themselves implicated in the power structures they oppose (Chapters 1, 2, and 3); and b) a concept that reveals the realm of the Real as independent of human consciousness while also being of profound interest for this consciousness and the subjectivity which it underpins (Chapters 3 and 4).

In outlining this argument, this study deploys the theories of Gilles Deleuze, Slavoj Žižek, and Alain Badiou, as well as the work of Jacques Rancière, Henri Lefebvre, Thomas Metzinger, Catherine Malabou, Quentin Meillassoux, and Ray Brassier. It, furthermore, works its way backwards from the Anglo-American cultural scene of the late 1990s and early 2000s (Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* and Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds*), through elaborations of punk anti-Thatcherite London(s) of the late 1970s/early 1980s (Peter Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor*, Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's *From Hell*, and Iain Sinclair *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings*), to post-1968 attempts to reinvigorate a progressive vision of the USA and write it (back) into existence through Gonzo autobiography and journalism (Oscar Zeta Acosta's *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* and *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*, and Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*). In this way, the argument of this work tries to find a path – through a deformed human body in works of literature, film, and comics – toward a non-human world that can be deployed in the service of a progressive political vision, even while the autonomy of this non-human world is recognised.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This would have been a very different, more barren, work without the guidance of Marcus Boon to whom I am, foremost, grateful. His ability to recognize the direction in which I was often-blindly stumbling and his determination to illuminate my path were – at times grudgingly – appreciated. His knowledge, patience, coaxing, and harangues all played a very important role in fattening this text and making it ready for consumption.

Without the intellectual generosity and seasoned advice of Art Redding and Ian Balfour much of what's presented here would have been considerably tougher to chew – and far more peppered with split infinitives.

I would also like to thank Thomas Loebel, Shannon Bell, and Steven Shaviro for taking the time to read this work and spend a Monday afternoon in May discussing it enthusiastically in a small, windowless room.

In addition to people listed above, Darren Gobert, Marie-Christine Leps, Jonathan Warren, Ross Arthur, Susan Warwick, Kathy Armstrong, and Dunja Baus made my experience at York University an exciting and challenging one. In ways too many to count, they facilitated my growth as an academic and as a person.

A heartfelt 'thank you' to Milena & Vladislav, Tamara & Sonia, and Ljiljana & Danko whose love, care, and support – often dispersed in odd ways and gargantuan amounts – is always noted and cherished if sometimes unremarked upon.

And finally, to Ana, who taught me that love is *also* both Symbolic and Real: here's hoping we grow grotesque together.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

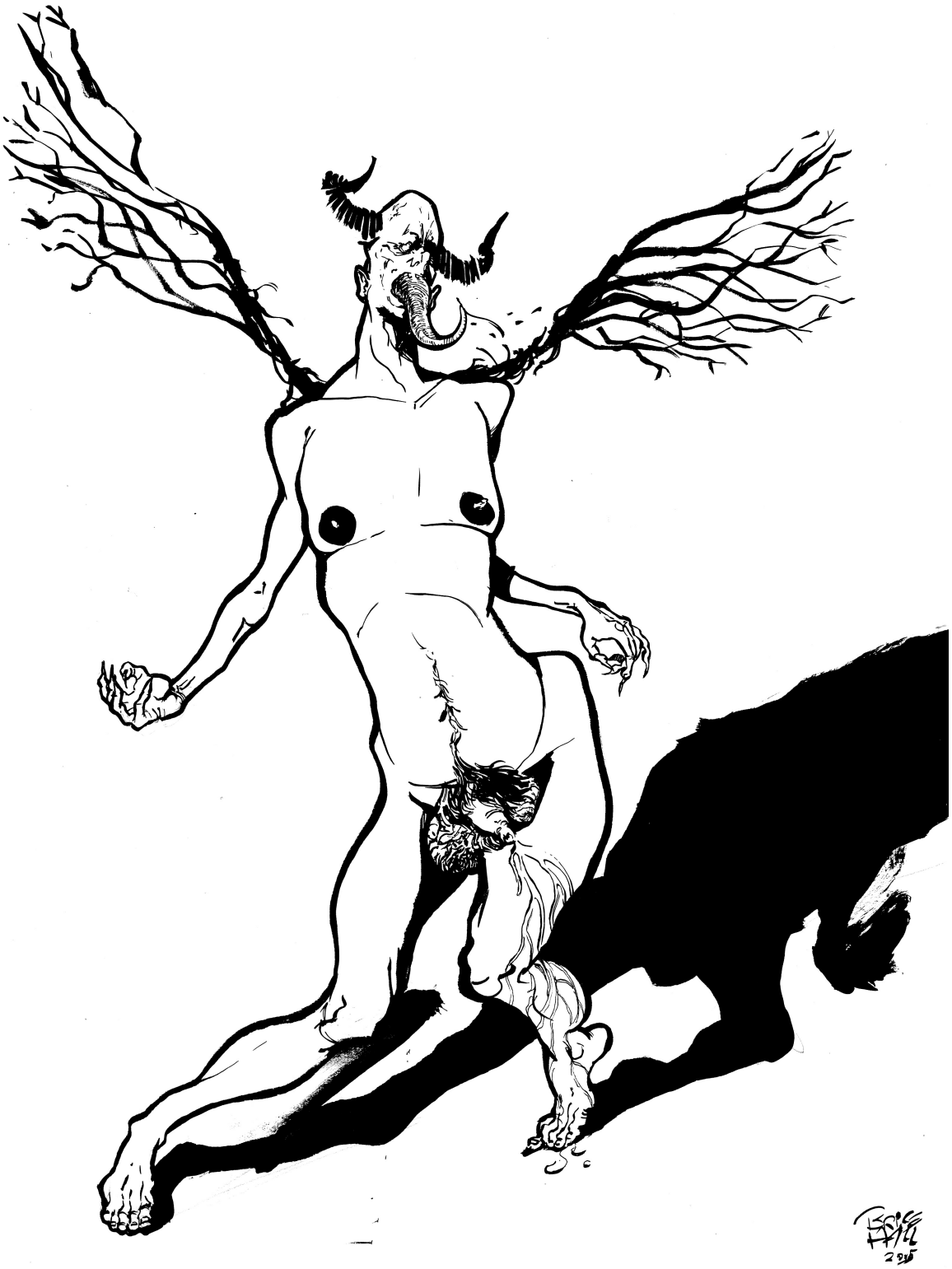
Introduction – Grotesque Multiplicities

Chapter One – Brutalised Bodies

Chapter Two – Londons Calling

THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY PANTAGRUEL:

THE FUNCTION OF GROTESQUE AESTHETICS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD



INTRODUCTION

Grotesque Multiplicities

Grotesque Content, Grotesque Expression

Two thousand and thirteen's *Snowpiercer* – a film directed by Joon-ho Bong and starring Chris Evans, Kang-ho Song, and John Hurt; produced in South Korea and filmed in English and Korean in the Czech Republic; adapted from a 1982 French graphic novel *La Transperceneige* written by Jacques Lob and Jean-Marc Rochette, published by Casterman and (in 2014) in an English translation by London's Titan Comics; worked on by a long list of Korean, US, Czech, German, French, Indian, Dutch, British, Chinese, and Canadian companies; and distributed in North America by The Weinstein Company and Anchor Bay Entertainment – was made for about 40 million dollars, making approximately 87 million in its theatrical run worldwide. Its narrative is set in a world frozen by global warming and humankind's belated attempts to avert its effects, a world in which the only (human) survivors live on a perpetually moving train travelling around the globe. At the front of the train: the hedonistic, decadent, and at times twisted rich, enjoying every kind of train-grown luxury. At the back: the tired, poor, huddled masses living in/as wretched refuse and subsisting on a protein-rich diet of crushed insects made into gelatinous bars the colour of congealed blood.

The world of *Snowpiercer* is replete with grotesque situations and images, both in the colloquial sense and the more specialized sense of the term to be used and discussed here. The filth and squalor of the back of the train as well as the poor's voracious ingestion of the protein bars (preceded in the early desperate days of the train by cannibalism) mark their world as

Figure 1: A punishment on the train

grotesque, a melding of "the dystopian class struggles of … Orwell novels and the grotesque characters of … fantasists Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Marc Caro" (Howell). The occupants of the back are here instantiations of what Slavoj Žižek and Terry Eagleton write of Oedipus at Colonus, a representative of human wretchedness who ultimately turns into an "inhuman monster" and the "scum of humanity" (Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject* 182). "Oedipus' polluted body," Eagleton writes in words that also adeptly describe the populace at the back of the train,

> signifies … the monstrous terror at the gates [of respectable society] in which, if it is to have a chance of rebirth, the polis must recognize its own hideous deformity. … In becoming nothing but the scum and refuse of the polis – the "shit of the earth," as St Paul racily describes the followers of Jesus, or the "total loss of humanity" which Marx portrays as the proletariat – Oedipus is divested of his identity and authority and so can offer his lacerated body as the cornerstone of a new social order. (185 – 186, 271)

As we will glimpse below, *Snowpiercer* imagines the beginnings of this new social order via a grotesque sacrifice of the protagonist who must come to a realization of his own – internal and external – (hideous) deformity.

The wretchedness of the poor section of the train is supplemented by a cast of characters who augment the desperate grotesques of the back with the surreal, (Terry) Gilliamesque ones of

the front: “In its constricted, surreal conception,” writes Andrew Pulver in a review of the film in *The Guardian*, “there’s something of absurdist theatre about *Snowpiercer*, though developed to grotesque extremes – as if Terry Gilliam … had been hired to rewrite Samuel Beckett. And in the … straight-faced way the inhabitants of this bizarre environment respond to it, [the movie] betrays the influence of recent Korean cinema – another of whose pre-eminent practitioners, Park Chan-wook, has a producer credit.” The quintessence of this absurd grotesquerie is Mason, played by Tilda Swinton (Figure 2), “a vile grotesque who wears brown fur over a mauve dress and then a sour-milk-colored suit” (Thomson), and who cruelly punishes those who dare to question their station in life (Figure 1): “A shoe belongs on your foot,” she lectures, “a hat belongs on your head. I am a hat; you are a shoe. … So it is” (*Snowpiercer*). “She is gawky, prim, bossy, spiteful,” continues David Thomson, “in a drab wig, false teeth, and archaic spectacles. As a cross between officious post-mistress and reticent dominatrix, she is hilarious, … plainly basing her character on several awful women from British politics of the last few decades (with a Birmingham accent).”

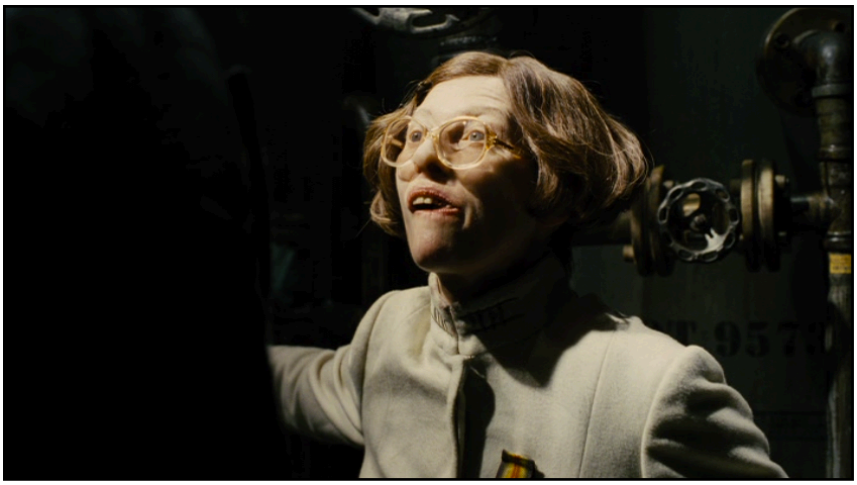


Figure 2: Tilda Swinton’s Mason

At the centre of this grotesque world, achieved by the combination of the tragic/horrific and the absurd/surreal as played out on various human bodies, is Curtis Everett (Chris Evans) who ultimately confronts his own wretchedness and leads a revolution from the back of the train,

which results in its destruction and the survival and emergence from the train into a now habitable world of a non-white, Korean and black, pair of children. Just before this, we learn that in the first days of living on the train a group led by the teenage Everett resorted to cannibalism, kidnapping an infant for the purpose of eating it and killing its mother, before Gilliam (played by John Hurt, further echoing this film's link with the works of Orwell and Terry Gilliam, and with the dystopian genre more generally) gave them a limb in exchange for the baby's life. "It was a thousand people in a metal box," narrates Everett,

> No food, no water. After a month, we ate the weak. … I know what people taste like. I know that babies taste best. There was a woman. She was hiding with her baby. Then some men with knives came. They killed her and they took her baby. And then an old man … stepped forward and he said, "Give me the knife." And everyone thought he'd kill the baby himself, but he took the knife… and he cut off his arm. And he said, "Eat this if you're so hungry. Eat this, just leave the baby." … And then … other people in the tail section started cutting off arms and legs and offering them. … A month later, … soldiers brought those protein blocks. We've been eating that shit ever since.

The narrative comes full circle when Everett, confronting the train's engineer who offers him a place in the front, sacrifices his own limb – and his life – to save one of the two above-mentioned children who had been made into a living part of the machinery of the train.

If we provisionally define the contemporary grotesque as predicated upon the image of the de-formation of the human body and as evoking a mixed emotional reaction, we can see the central image of the film as grotesque: the human body, violently shorn of its limb(s), becomes here the signifier of sacrifice, revolution, and of critique of the capitalist economic system which (will have) caused near-extinction of life on the planet and which exacerbated the unequal

division of wealth and resources. *Snowpiercer* thus uses a grotesque image and its dystopian, grotesquely absurd setting to render a symbolic, utopian vision of a birth of a truly democratic society in which "nobody is constrained to stay in his or her particular place, everybody has the right to participate in universal affairs, to have her say in deliberations about the direction of society" (Žižek, *Living in the End Times* 13).

Like a number of recent movies – *Wall-E*, *Hunger Games*, *Elysium*, *Children of Men*, *V for Vendetta* (of which more soon), and the forthcoming *Mad Max* being perhaps the most prominent examples – *Snowpiercer* imagines a reality that is not quite here but is uncannily familiar – there, on the horizon. In an interview with John Tarleton about her *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (2014), Naomi Klein invokes these fictional dystopian worlds, noting: "It's actually not controversial to say this is where we are headed. The question is, can we imagine another way of responding to crisis other than one of deepening inequality, brutal disaster capitalism and mangled techno-fixes, because that seems to be where people agree we're headed." In this context, *Snowpiercer* is a work of genre-fiction created for a niche market that uses the grotesque image and (in a more colloquial use of the term) a grotesque scenario to depict critically "an apocalyptic zero-point" of the global capitalist system: "the ecological crisis, the consequences of the biogenetic revolution, imbalances within the system … (problems with intellectual property; … struggles over raw materials, food and water), and the explosive growth of social divisions and exclusions" (Žižek, *Living* x).

At the same time, this film (and bigger budget movies like *Wall-E*, *The Hunger Games*, *V for Vendetta*, and, presumably, *Mad Max* do this even more successfully) participates in and fully benefits from the capitalist axiomatic encapsulated by twin processes of globalization and profit-making. Testified to not only by its production machinery outlined above, but also by the

casting of Chris Evans – Captain America, who as a signifier recalls Disney's recent purchase of Marvel for 4 billion dollars as well as Cap's status as the defender of the American way[1] – *Snowpiercer* encapsulates the status of practically every cultural artefact made today: produced and distributed through the processes made possible by capitalism as an economic system. This is particularly true when it comes to niche market products such as *Snowpiercer,* which would be impossible to make and distribute without the capitalist context that allows for niche markets to be profitable. In this context, the utopian ending of the film rings hollow and naïve, a placebo or a vent for the politically aware and a fun spectacle for everyone – a product to which we ought to react with what we have come to describe as postmodern irony and detachment.

As an aesthetic mode widely utilised in niche and not-so-niche market products – particularly in comics and genre films, literature, and television shows but also in what is often described as high art – the grotesque is today an important marker of this ambiguity of global capitalism; and this function of the grotesque exists along with its ontological ambiguity. On the one hand, its genealogy as a socio-politically and morally subversive aesthetic form makes of the grotesque an important tool of cultural critique, which *Snowpiercer* as well as movies that follow George Romero's seminal (for the contemporary period as I define it here) *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) register quite successfully. On the other hand, the gory, violent, and often funny spectacle associated with the grotesque makes of it ideal fodder for the society in which "capital [has been] accumulated to the point where it becomes image" (Debord 144) and where that image serves the function of mediator of social relationships between people (142). The grotesque image is in this context an important component of the process of consumption that

[1] The importance of Evans's character death at the end of the film should not escape us here.

replaces traditional modes of relation, as both social identities and interpersonal relationships become more and more implicated in the question, "Have you seen/consumed x yet?"

Yet, again, on both the genealogical (socio-historical) and ontological (theoretical) levels, the grotesque's subversive potential persists, tightly bound with the ambiguities of the capitalist moment within which it is deployed. And in many ways, the grotesque aesthetic mode allows us to see clearly not only this ambiguity but also, more abstractly, the ontological characteristics that define our world. At the conclusion of his argument about Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and the age of the Baroque in his 1993 text *The Fold*, Gilles Deleuze points to an important feature of this ontological aspect of our world by highlighting the difference between the monadic world of the seventeenth century and the nomadic world of the contemporary moment. Deleuze argues that despite the fact that, even today, "we all remain Leibnizian because what always matters is folding, unfolding, [and] refolding" (*The Fold* 137), the Leibnizian monad has, in the contemporary moment, metamorphosed: it has become "in tune with divergent series that belong to incompossible monads" and to incompossible worlds – something that the Baroque world explicitly precluded. "[I]t could be said," Deleuze infers via a grotesque image, "that the monad, astraddle over several worlds, is [today] kept half open as if by a pair of pliers" (137). Nomadology, he claims, with its fundamentally open, connective, rhizomatic character has replaced Leibnizian monadology in which the subject echoes/harmonizes with the best possible world by being, as it were, closed or folded in – separate but compossible with this world – and by excluding all the worlds incompossible with it.

Along with this ontological content through which the world of the metamorphosed monad (i.e. today's nomad in the nomadic world) can be conceptualised, the contemporary moment's second defining feature is its socio-political expression rooted in global or late-stage

capitalism, in what Alain Badiou calls "capitalo-parliamentarism" (*Being and Event* xii) or "democratic materialism" (*Logics of Worlds* 1). This socio-political expression of our world functions via the logic of unremitting carnivalisation of everyday life that transforms enjoyment of the new into a "weird and twisted ethical duty" founded upon consumption (Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* 343). In this way, "with the full deployment of … 'late capitalism,' it is the predominant 'normal' way of life which … becomes 'carnivalized,' with constant self-revolutionizing, reversals, crises, and reinventions" (197) – reinventions which can be witnessed in areas as diverse as music, fashion, finance, education, and various forms of technology. "It is the reign of contemporary capitalism," concludes Žižek, "which is the true Lord of Misrule" (198). As Brian Massumi similarly notes, in global capitalism,

> the more varied, and even erratic, the better. … The regularities start to loosen. This loosening of normalcy is part of capitalism's dynamic. It's not a simple liberation. It's capitalism's own form of power. It's no longer disciplinary institutional power that defines everything, it's capitalism's power to produce variety – because markets get saturated. Produce variety and you produce a niche market. The oddest of affective tendencies are okay – as long as they pay. Capitalism starts intensifying or diversifying affect, but only in order to extract surplus-value. … [As a result] there's been a certain kind of convergence between the dynamic of capitalist power and the dynamic of resistance [as illustrated by the *Snowpiercer* example]. ("Navigating Movements" 224)

Both the content and the expression of the contemporary moment – both the ontological nomadism predicated upon the image of a body kept half open as if by a pair of pliers, and the socio-economic apparatus of global capitalism predicated on the continual carnivalisation of

everyday life – are intimately entwined with the logic of the grotesque[2], an aesthetic mode which Thomas Mann, early in the twentieth century, characterised as representing "the supra-true and the exceedingly real, not the arbitrary, false, antireal, and absurd" (*Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man* 417) and as "the most genuine style" of modern art – "to the extent, indeed, that today [it] is the only guise in which the sublime may appear. For," Mann concludes, "the grotesque is the genuine anti-bourgeois style" ("Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*" 240 – 41).

As I hope this work will show, this onto-logic of the grotesque is at the heart of contemporary discussions of politics and of being. The grotesque is in this sense Janus-faced, existing on the edge between what Lacan refers to as the Symbolic and the Real. On the one hand, the grotesque is deeply enmeshed in socio-political, Symbolic elaborations of counter-hegemonic discourses whose efficacy is here in question. As such, any theoretical or ontological elaboration of this aesthetic form is necessarily "correlational" and "decisional[3]." This means that the grotesque's truth is predicated on the way in which the human mind experiences reality, and the way the human being is – materially as well as socio-politically – situated in relation to what, using Kantian terminology, we could call the realm of the phenomenal. The present

---

[2] Alain Badiou, Gilles Deleuze, and Slavoj Žižek's theories will form the theoretical backbone of this work, and what is at stake in their disagreements about the structure of worlds (particularly via what will here be discussed via the notion of *multiplicity*) can in many ways be discussed through a conceptualization of a kind of onto-politics of the grotesque.

[3] The terms "correlation" and "decision" emerge from the work of speculative realists Quentin Meillassoux (correlation) and Ray Brassier, who borrows the term "decision" from François Laruelle. The main trajectory of these terms is critical, as it marks and questions the poststructuralist tendency to theorize reality only in terms of its relation to the human mind or language/discourse. "Decision," in the context of the present work's argument, marks the formal aspect of this poststructuralist strategy by looking at how correlational thought builds its argument philosophically via a triadic structure of datum, factum, and the third term that emerges from the relation of these two. More of this below.

introduction and the three chapters that follow focus on this aspect of the grotesque by theorizing its ontological aspects as deeply related to political questions that dominate the post-1968 Western world and the human subjects' being in it.

On the other hand, the grotesque allows us to think the ontological realm as separate from the modern, post-Kantian correlationism. In this sense, this aesthetic mode reveals the realm of the Real as separable from human consciousness and discourse. Chapter three opens up the possibility of thinking this non-human world by arguing that: a) grotesque imagistic language performs transgression on the level of Symbolic reality as language's function as transmitter of meaning is temporarily nullified in favour of use of language as information, and b) as a corollary of the first transgression, grotesque-imagistic language reveals the a-human horizon of matter in-itself as autonomous, a horizon "of separability of thought and being, their non-correlation" (Brassier, *Nihil Unbound* 84). As non-homogenous, in other words, language and discourse can and do, through their functioning, "exteriorize[ ] the sensible opposite itself, as an object" (Lyotard 38) and the grotesque draws our attention to this. The fourth chapter, finally, argues that while the realm of the Real revealed by the grotesque is indeed independent of human consciousness and discourse, it is also of profound interest for this consciousness and the subjectivity that it underpins. While pursuing the path Kant generally outlined with his thought of the noumenal, the Real is here theorized in terms of a materialism rooted in a theory of spacetime and the studies of the brain and this organ's plasticity[4].

[4] The concept of plasticity, as I use it in the last chapter, is made operative in philosophy by Catherine Malabou, a post-Derridean philosopher who sees plasticity as registering a change in the way we perceive change (as earlier registered by Derrida's concept of *différance*). She stresses plasticity as opening up the realm of writing to what is outside it and different from it, and as conveying "a dual ability [of physical and/or conceptual structures] to receive form … and give form[4]" (*Changing Difference* 63).

Grotesque History

Historically, the grotesque as an aesthetic mode has been conceptualised in two ostensibly opposed yet essentially interrelated ways. On the one hand, it has been imagined as a culturally trivial but commercially lucrative mode of expression, barely – if at all – deserving a place alongside art proper. On the other hand, the grotesque has been defended and celebrated as not only an artistically and culturally significant mode of expression – "varied," "original," "novel," and "beautiful" (Vasari, qtd. in Barasch, *The Grotesque* 30) – but also as implicitly cathartic and liberating. Both of these conceptualisations, however, stem from a perception of the grotesque as a potentially – aesthetically, politically, and/or morally – subversive and revolutionary form of art defined loosely as "something radically discrepant from an assumed normative pattern" produced by "an aesthetic fusion that generates a correspondingly mixed intellectual and emotional response" (Thompson, G. R. 103); and further described as "a play with the absurd" (Kayser 187) productive of an "estranged world" (184) which reflects "a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 24) and which negates "classical harmony and form" (Barasch, *The Grotesque* 10) in service of – as we shall later see – a different kind of polyvocal (maybe even, at times, cacophonous) harmony. Furthermore, the grotesque "always displays *a combination of fearsome and ludicrous qualities* – or, to be more precise, it simultaneously arouses reactions of fear and amusement in the observer" (Jennings 10).

The root of grotesque's subversiveness has traditionally been located in its opposition to that classical harmony and integrity of form of which Frances K. Barasch – as well as Mikhail Bakhtin – writes[5]. Perceived either as consecrating "inventive freedom" in the service of a

[5] See Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*, 30ff.

liberation "from the prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 34), or as an "expression of our failure to orient ourselves in the physical universe" (Kayser 185), the grotesque is fundamentally an aesthetic "structure" (Kayser 184) that participates in the creation of carnivalesque (Bakhtin) or estranged (Kayser) worlds. It is the "'other side' of that which is denied, the carnivalesque upside down" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 410) that creates a world other than our own, a "completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 6). Or, as Kayser sees it, the use of the grotesque makes "the elements … which are familiar and natural to us" appear "strange and ominous" (184).

When, however, hegemonic discourses become themselves implicated in the logic of carnivalisation – as, according to Žižek and Massumi, they do in late-stage or global capitalism – the role of the grotesque must alter in order to accommodate not only the changed aspect of established reality but also its own participation in and collusion with this reality. The question (frequently posed in relation to the political function of this aesthetic mode) of whether the grotesque-carnivalesque ever truly represents a form of popular resistance to the established hierarchies or whether it is ever anything more than a type of "safety valve[ ] … conducive to the good order" and smooth functioning of the polis at large (Stallybrass and White 72 – 73) becomes, as a result, inoperative and inapplicable. This is so because these two options are in global capitalism seen as compatible and as non-exclusive of one another. The grotesque-carnivalesque is therefore, in the contemporary context, both an example of "reversal as a temporary respite, the exception stabilizing" the functioning of the dominant order which operates via "constant self-revolutionizing, … reversals, crises, reinventions" (Žižek, *Organs* 212 – 13) *and* an ever-present undercurrent of subversive potential derailing the smooth

functioning of the logic of late-stage capitalism[6]. The grotesque is in the contemporary context a concept functioning on the principle of disjunctive synthesis: a "positive and affirmative use" of synthesis within which "divergent series" (i.e. different conceptualisations of the grotesque: progressive, conservative, reactionary) "resonate" with one another (Deleuze, *Logic of Sense* 229) in a "non-relation [which] is still a relation, and even a relation of a deeper sort" (Deleuze, *Foucault* 53).

The gendering of the grotesque in, especially, the twentieth and twenty-first centuries makes its disjunctively synthetic dynamic immediately apparent. As Julia Kristeva points out, patriarchal Symbolic systems have long associated the abject and the grotesque with the female body in order to represent various dangers posed to these systems from without and from within (71). "Carnival," Kristeva writes in her analysis of the work of Louis-Ferdinand Céline, "covers up incest" (165) and its danger to the social, and the women of this world – associated with excrement and menstrual blood – are presented as "wild, obscene, and threatening" abject femininities, dangerous to the patriarchal Symbolic and thus aligned with various taboos (167). "Women," Kristeva quotes Céline, "they wane by candle-light, they spoil, melt, twist, and ooze;" and then she adds: "[T]here you have the muse just as she is after two thousand years of art and religion. A muse in the true tradition of the … carnivalesque" whose "pitiful power of the feminine" is unbridled "only with the help of masculine degradation or bankruptcy – a bankruptcy of the father and manly authority" (169).

[6] Of course, "smooth" functioning of late-stage capitalism is predicated on its *not* running smoothly – as Massumi notes, in capitalism, the "more erratic, the better." It is, however, precisely the fact that our socio-economic reality unabashedly functions this way that allows us to see any concept as functioning via the logic of synthetic disjunction – as both this *and* that.

Paradoxically, this manly authority has in the contemporary world also been shored up by uses of the grotesque in constructions of masculinity and homosocial spaces. As examples from comics, punk and shock-rock, to gross-out comedies show, the grotesque has frequently been utilised as the special provenance of (often heterosexual, white) masculinity and male bonding[7]. In fact, a large majority of the texts analysed in this work are written by male authors who use the grotesque to explore their world and their place within it, and a number of these authors' works (Quentin Tarantino's, R. Crumb's, Oscar Zeta Acosta's, Hunter S. Thompson's) have been directly accused of misogyny, as well as racism. Henry Giroux, for example, writing of *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction*, argues that "Tarantino's use of hyper-real violence [which lies at the centre of his deployment of the grotesque] is propped up by a 'cool' masculinity that simply recycles a patriarchal hatred of women while barely hiding its own homophobic instincts" (81). Critics of Oscar Zeta Acosta's and Hunter S. Thompson's gonzo autobiography and journalism have similarly argued that women are, in their works, cast as nothing but props for masculine self-exploration and definition: "[T]he most frequent criticisms of [Acosta's] works," writes Michael Hames-García, for example, "accuse him of the sexual chauvinism that has often characterized Chicano cultural nationalism" (473).

As we will see, this use of the grotesque reaches a kind of apotheosis in the work of Samuel Delany, whose grotesquely pornographic *The Mad Man*[8] (1994), discussed in the final

[7] Films like *Bridesmaids* and the fact that Vulvatron has recently become the frontwoman of GWAR, one of music's most grotesque acts, have recently revealed a slightly more general acceptance of the positive alignment between the feminine and the grotesque.

[8] Along *The Mad Man*, Delany's other pornographic novels – *Hogg* (1969, published in 1995), *Phallos* (2004), and some of his works of fantasy and science fiction – similarly explore various aspects of masculinity, and homosociality and homosexuality.

chapter, knowingly uses representations of explicit and at times excessive homosexual acts to engage in an exploration of the issues of constructions of masculinity and homosocial-turned-homosexual spaces. Delany warns the readers of his novel to take it as "a pornotopic fantasy" to be read as a series of events that "could never happen for any number of surely self-evident reasons" (ix). *The Mad Man* thus retroactively shines a light on the rest of the texts explored in the present work. As we will see, practically all the texts discussed here are deeply interested in issues of representation, performance, and their Symbolic import. Their focus on the human form and its grotesque deformation is a sign of a strategy that reflects these interests and, hence, even when they are paper-thin elaborations of masculine preoccupations – as is often the case with the works of Acosta and Thompson, for example – representations of women in these texts are parts of a strategy of self-conscious exploration and critique of a particular tradition and Symbolic arrangement which are always, importantly, represented as our own and, at the same time, as systems in need of transformation.

All these works – especially those written by white, heterosexual men – therefore tread a thin line between exploitation and critical elaboration. As they exist in a Western, patriarchal context within a tradition that has often been used to denigrate the weaker (gender, sexuality, religion, or race) and empower and consolidate the position of hegemonic victors, these works always carry a trace of their culture and are smeared by it, by this culture's "nostalgia" and "uncritical populism" that "violently abuses and demonizes *weaker*, not stronger social groups – women, ethnic and religious minorities, those who 'don't belong' – in a process of *displaced abjection*" (Stallybrass and White 19).

Yet, at the same time, these texts are always directly – as are the grotesque, the carnival, and the carnivalesque more generally – "sites of … symbolic struggle" (14). It is therefore

unsurprising that theorists such as Kristeva, Bakhtin, Deleuze, Hélène Cixous, Mary Russo, and Barbara Creed, among others, have utilised the above elaborated use of the female grotesques as potentially empowering for women and as liberating from present Symbolic orders – for both women and men. Russo, for example, notes that the understanding of femininity as grotesque and abject is "crucial to identity-formation for both men and women as a space of risk and abjection … through an association with the feminine as the body marked by difference" (12 – 13). In her *The Monstrous Feminine*, Creed similarly argues that even though images of female grotesques are "central to our culturally … constructed notions of the horrific" which mark a "split between two orders: the maternal authority and the law of the father" (13), the maternal authority is not thus necessarily subservient: "[T]he womb is not the site of castration anxiety," she writes; "Rather, the womb signifies 'fullness' or 'emptiness' but always it is its *own point of reference*" (27). The figure of the mother and her womb is also central to Bakhtin's discussion of the grotesque-carnivalesque as subversive and as depicting "the gay form of the body that grows, procreates, and is victorious" (339). Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the Body without Organs is closely linked with what they describe as becoming-woman; and Kristeva's notion of abjection – closely related to the grotesque – as rooted in "defilements which stem from the maternal" (71) is central to her attempts to break free of the reductive patriarchal logic premised on the dynamic between (the usually masculinized) subject and (the usually feminized) object.

The present work is committed to the progressive potential of this aesthetic form and thus reads its texts generously – but not, I hope, uncritically. It aims to recognize and elaborate this form's progressive impulse: this is its wager, its decision. As such, it poses the question Darieck Scott asks of historical and aesthetic abjection and humiliation of racialized bodies in his *Extravagant Abjection*: "[W]hat is the potential for useful political, personal, psychological

resource" carried by the grotesque as an aesthetic form and an ambiguous "historical legacy…? How do we," furthermore, "work with that legacy now," and "how do we *use* it to fit our own exigencies?" Finally, can this ambiguous aesthetic form – whose overall functioning rests on the logic of disjunctive synthesis and therefore simultaneously carries progressive, conservative, and reactionary political potential – be "understood or experienced as an aspect of historical experience – a resource for the political present – that broadens and even enriches the expanse of what is human being rather than setting its limits or marking its terror-bound underside" (6)?

Grotesque Capital

We can start answering these questions via a brief discussion of the history of the avant-gardes, which provides an excellent example of how a subversive artistic-political movement was slowly co-opted into the functioning of its socio-political context. The modern and postmodern avant-gardes peaked in two waves: between 1910 and 1930, and then between 1950 and 1970 (van der Berg 64), with the second wave frequently, following Peter Bürger's seminal *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974), being dismissed as "hobbled by [its] structural embededness … in the institutional infrastructures of the West" (Hopkins 3). Even if this is a somewhat reductive reading of the neo-avant-garde of the 1950s and 1960s – which can more positively be read as "the agent of [avant-gardes'] eventual self-comprehension" (Hopkins 7) – the last decades of the twentieth century and the first of the twenty-first have, as is the case with the grotesque, made this question of the political effectiveness of the avant-gardes inoperative. Permanently residing in the disavowed space of practices (what we can, after Pierre Bourdieu,

call "habitus"[9]) between fields of symbolic and economic capital (Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* 75), contemporary avant-gardes must straddle and navigate different kinds of capital (symbolic, cultural, economic) which "under certain conditions, and always in the long run, guarantee[ ] 'economic' profits" (75). This is particularly so since the academic and cultural institutions have, today, become deeply implicated in the functioning of the free market.

From the beginning of the twentieth century, avant-gardism as a cultural praxis – which is "an exclusively modern discovery" (Bontempelli, qtd. in Poggioli 14) and whose key features are often identified as being "revolutionary, counter-discursive, and anti-institutional" (Murphy 3)[10] – functioned as a type of "'ideology critique' through which artistic practice [was] turned against art itself as an institutional formation" (Murphy 9). As agents of avant-gardes' self-comprehension, implicated not only in the functioning of artistic but also increasingly of economic institutions, the neo-avant-garde of the 1950s and 60s pushed this praxis (of turning its products against institutional formations) further by expanding the avant-gardes' task of ideology critique to the plurality of institutions caught up in the production and distribution of late twentieth-century art (universities, museums, governmental institutions, as well as private

[9] Pierre Bourdieu defines *habitus* as the system of "durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor" (*The Logic of Practice* 53).

[10] We shouldn't, of course, forget the example of Filippo Marinetti's Futurism, the explicitly fascist avant-garde movement which does not neatly fit in with this conceptualization of the avant-garde; nor should we forget the conservative political leanings of key modernist avant-garde figures such as Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot.

businesses)[11]. By almost fully absorbing the concrete manifestations of avant-garde art, the institutional framework of late-stage capitalism (which, again, includes academic and cultural institutions) has also absorbed this overt function of avant-garde art to function as ideology/ institutional critique. Consequently, both the works of an avant-garde composer such as Pierre Boulez and that of a popular filmmaker such as Alfred Hitchcock can be legitimately discussed as examples of (commercial) art with a potential to foster and facilitate flows of what Deleuze refers to as deterritorialization which work against a capitalist axiomatic, or as ways to discuss the "fundamental impasse[s] of [capitalist] democracy" (Žižek, *Looking Awry* 168)[12].

Alan Moore and David Lloyd's serialised comic (or, as per marketing lingo, graphic novel) *V for Vendetta* provides, in this context, an instructive example[13]. Published, as comics

[11] Andy Warhol, the apotheosis of neo-avant-garde, and his work with commercial products (soap-boxes, Coca-Cola bottles) as well as his work with another kind of commercial product – Hollywood celebrities – epitomise the praxis of avant-garde art as 'ideology critique' from within the institutional framework. Not only did he base some of his art on commercial products, but some of this art is a direct outcome of his work "as a commercial illustrator and department store window designer for some thirteen years, [during which] he honed his considerable skills as a draftsman, worked with the best professionals in the field, won important awards, and received generous financial compensation from prestigious clients. At the same time, with his eye on success in the fine arts, he continued to draw, make collages, and paint, sometimes incorporating commercial techniques into his processes" (Morgan, "Andy Warhol" 504).

[12] This is, of course, where the issue of niche-markets becomes important as illustrated by something as simple as the current proliferation of LPs as a niche market within the overall larger structure of the music industry.

[13] I am here, perhaps somewhat tendentiously, aligning Moore and Lloyd's work in the *Warrior* with the works of avant-garde artists. Even though many would, I presume, balk at classifying as avant-garde a serialized comic published in what was ultimately a science fiction/fantasy/superhero publication, *Warrior*'s work and publication politics and ethics makes this, I believe, a justifiable alignment. Maggie Gray writes: "*Warrior* was a black and white monthly that ran for 26 issues from March 1982 to February 1985. The title was inaugurated by Dez Skinn in 1981, after he quit as editorial director of Marvel UK. Skinn resented the constraints of working for a major corporation, particularly as it affected creative quality. Setting up his own

often are, twice – originally for a niche market in the early 1980s and for a more mainstream audience later in the same decade – Moore and Lloyd's comic functions in (at least) a two-fold context. Originally serialized between 1982 and 1985 in a British independent comics anthology *Warrior*, *V for Vendetta* contributed to the goal of this independent comic to "consciously and contradictorily … negotiate a space for underground and fanzine principles within the mainstream British market" (Gray 32)[14]. Using the high level of "creative autonomy given to [*Warrior*'s] artists and writers" (33), *V for Vendetta* was

> extensively developed in and shaped by the political context of the early 1980s: … it constituted a critique of both the emerging New Right and contemporary neo-Nazi groups; … [and] it related to contemporary debates within the anarchist movement and on the wider Left about the legitimacy of violent resistance and the precise nature of Thatcherism. (Gray 32)

However, considering Moore and Lloyd's text, as James R. Keller does, in the context of the late 1980s when it was completed and republished by DC Comics, one of the best-established mainstream comic book publishers in the United States of America and the world, provides a

---

independent publishing company, significantly titled 'Quality,' Skinn reconvened the team of young British artists and writers with whom he had worked on successful Marvel UK publications such as *The Incredible Hulk Weekly* to develop the new, groundbreaking comic. Most of these creators, like Moore, were concurrently freelancing for *2000AD* and involved in UK comics fandom. While some had also emerged from the underground, they predominantly shared Skinn's ambitions for revitalizing British comics through innovative newsagent titles aimed at a wide audience, in competition with mainstream publishers. However, this was combined with a shared commitment to creative independence, social commentary, and exploration of adult themes, distinctly evocative of comix and self-publishing practices" (32).

[14] It is, therefore, no surprise that this project failed economically, ending its run "with a deficit of c. $36,000 according to [its founder Derek "Dez"] Skinn, despite being heavily subsidized by his Quality comics shop and mail order service" (Gray 33).

reading that sees the concerns of *V for Vendetta* as different: as "specifically motivated by the [United Kingdom's] Conservative government's homophobic response to the AIDS crisis and introduction of Section 28 in 1988" (Gray 32)[15]. Furthermore, its publication by DC Comics in the North American and global contexts abstracts the geographical specificity of political references in the text, creating out of it a work in the canon of modern dystopian literature along such titles as George Orwell's *1984* (1949), Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), and P. D. James's *The Children of Men* (1992)[16].

Today, widely available in North America in a collected trade paperback edition published under DC's Vertigo[17] imprint, *V for Vendetta* functions within the institutional context of late-stage capitalism and feeds the capitalist axiomatic based on the "framework of profit which encloses the entire process" (Žižek, *Living* 264) of, in this case, writing/drawing and publication. But Moore and Lloyd's text also presents itself – through its thematic content – as a

[15] Section 28 of the UK Local Government Act 1988 states that a local authority shall not: a) "intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality," and b) "promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship" ("Local Government Act 1988"). This act was repealed in 2000 – 2003.

[16] We should here also note that in the 2005 Hollywood adaptation of the comic, "the allusions to the Gunpowder plot are replaced by the post-9/11 homeland security laws in the United States" (Edwards and Graulund 141).

[17] On its website, DC describes Vertigo, one of its (if not the) most popular, edgy, and profitable imprints, as follows: "As graphic storytelling matured and began to reach out to broader audiences, Vertigo was created in 1993 as a venue for material of an edgier, more sophisticated nature. Many of today's most provocative writers and artists, including Neil Gaiman, Brian K. Vaughn, Warren Ellis, Gilbert Hernandez, Peter Milligan, Grant Morrison, Paul Pope and Brian Azzarello, have found a creative home at Vertigo." In this very description we see a union of a kind of attempt at representing subversiveness (with the mention of "provocative" writers and "edgy" publications) *and* profitability ("broader audiences").

provocative and, indeed, edgy meditation on the topic around which there seems to be in the today's Western world a firm liberal-humanist consensus: the topic of terrorism. Alan Moore's reaction to the institutional life of his work is, therefore, on the one hand, comprehensible: "I will probably love the comic book medium forever … [and] I had nothing but love for the comics industry when I entered it," he states in an interview; but today, "on one level, I am finished with Comics and disgusted with the practices of the … industry" (Tantimedh)[18]. On the other hand, Moore and Lloyd's comic and its film adaptation provoked, upon the release of the film in 2006, a somewhat unified response in the US from a wide array of publications on both the political left and right:

> *TIME Magazine*: "Is it possible for a major Hollywood studio to make a $50 million movie in which the hero is a terrorist? … [This is] not [a] rhetorical question[ ]. *V for Vendetta* … is that movie, and it is the most bizarre Hollywood production you will see (or refuse to see) this year. It's the kind of film that makes you ask questions like, Who thought this was a good idea?" (Grossman)
>
> *WorldNetDaily.com*: "It has only been two weeks since the Oscar ceremony celebrated left-wing politics and anti-Christian bigotry with such movies as *Brokeback Mountain* and *Syriana*. Today, Time Warner is continuing that policy by releasing *V for Vendetta* – a vile, pro-terrorist piece of neo-Marxist, left-wing propaganda filled with radical sexual politics and nasty attacks on religion and Christianity." (Baehr)
>
> *The New Yorker*: "*V for Vendetta*, a dunderheaded pop fantasia that celebrates terrorism and destruction, is perhaps the ultimate example of how a project with modest

[18] Alan Moore's relationship with DC, specifically in relation to his industry-changing *Watchmen*, is now a much discussed and well-known topic. For further information, see Moore's full interview with Adi Tantimedh at www.bleedingcool.com/2010/09/09/alan-moore-speaks-watchmen-2-to-adi-tantimedh.

origins becomes a media monster. … [T]his kind of comic-book paranoia doesn't seem as playful or innocent as it used to." (Denby)

As can be seen from these reactions, the distribution of a commercial work of art by a major publishing house or studio cannot successfully nullify the undercurrent of that "'ideology critique' through which artistic practice [was] turned against art itself as an institutional formation" (Murphy 9) by the avant-gardes that have been (successfully) integrated into their institutional context. In other words, despite its institutional status, a work of commercial art such as *V for Vendetta* can still raise some uncomfortable questions and point to democracy itself (which, to a certain extent, makes this work possible) as "our last fetish" that "protects us against democracy itself, against its own 'non-democratic' core, the violent 'terroristic' excess which the complex democratic rules try to keep at bay" (Žižek, *Living* 391 – 392). Furthermore, by going against the accepted status quo that sees terrorism as nothing but a "scourge" (UN Counter-Terrorism) and an "enemy" that "pose[s] the greatest national security threat to the United States … our allies and interests, and the broader international system" (US Dept. of State), works such as *V for Vendetta* can provide a platform for a discussion that can concretely and substantially produce, as G. R. Thompson writes generally of the grotesque, "something radically discrepant from an assumed normative pattern" (103).

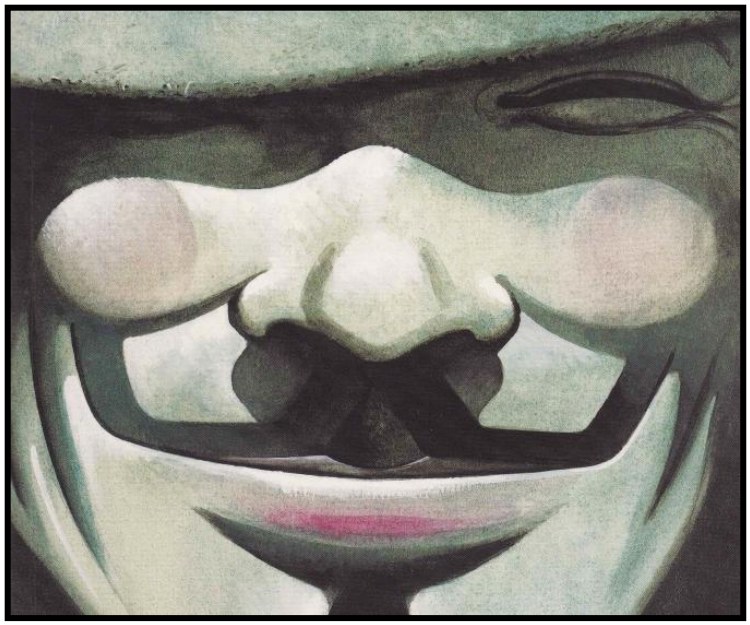


Figure 3: Cover of the Vertigo edition of *V for Vendetta* (Detail)

Allow me to briefly pre-empt my broader discussion of the grotesque by noting that the issue of this aesthetic form, as illustrated by Moore and Lloyd's *V for Vendetta*, lies at the very heart of the above-discussed problem of subversion[19]. The Guy Fawkes mask worn by the text's antihero – whose name is, somewhat cryptically, V – hides a grotesque face[20], burned and disfigured by "mustard gas" and "napalm" he had been building from "the ammonia," "the grease solvent and all the other stuff" (Moore and Lloyd 83) he had procured while a prisoner at the Auschwitz-style Larkhill Resettlement Camp, which in the dystopian near-future of the text imprisons "all the black people and the Pakistanis" and "[w]hite people, too. All the radicals and … [t]he homosexuals" (28). V, the anonymous anarchist antihero is here presented as a disguised grotesque, burned body violently unsettling the fascist power of the government by literally "exploding the material and symbolic power base of the nation" (Edwards and Graulund 141). James R. Keller writes of V's grotesque body, highlighting its importance for the text's narrative by noting that V's and Evey's bond echoes that of King Richard III and Lady Anne in Shakespeare's *The Life and Death of Richard the Third*, in that both relationships centre on "the union of beauty and deformity" (146).

Importantly, the Fawkes mask has recently been adopted by the Occupy movement which used it to hide protestors' faces in order to make criminal prosecution difficult while also linking the protestors "to a global community … outraged by the greed and corruption of the financial

---

[19] I further discuss Moore's work in relation to the grotesque in Chapter 2.

[20] V's grotesque form is only alluded to in the comic through the parallel between the two protagonists, Evey and V. We know that V escaped Larkhill when he set off an explosion in his room, emerging from the burning chaos of the camp shrouded in flames. The fact that Evey is later baptized in rain, as she accepts becoming the new V, parallels V's own baptism in the flames of Larkhill. This event also parallels the roles of V and Evey as anarchy's "two faces, both creator and destroyer" (Moore and Lloyd 248). V's burned, grotesque form is made explicit in the filmed version *V for Vendetta*, where his burns are shown as he puts a glove on.

elite" (Edwards and Graulund 140)[21]. By doing so, the Occupy movement – purposely or inadvertently – postulated a disfigured, grotesque body as the very locus of opposition to greed and corruption by metaphorically aligning individual protesting bodies with the body of the anonymous disfigured antihero of Moore and Lloyd's text. However, with the 2005 Warner Bros movie adaptation of *V for Vendetta*, which in a characteristically Hollywood gesture romanticizes its protagonist in a way the comic refuses to, this symbol is also deployed by a "multi-national media syndicate" which consequently "owns the licensing rights to the masks worn by the Occupy protestors" (Edwards and Graulund 141). There is, as Justin Edwards and Rune Graulund write in their study of the grotesque, "irony, potentially even [carnivalesque] laughter" in this fact (141). As they conclude,

> Late capitalism does not need to battle against dissent, for the power of contemporary capitalism 'thrives on the creative energies of cultural resistance,' prospering from decentralized behaviour by being more mobile than the forces from the peripheries…. Even the potentially carnivalesque-grotesque scenes of an Occupy street protest or the anarchic voices of internet news reports can be branded, packaged and sold, 'infecting' everything in its vicinity and pre-empting any robust challenge to the hegemony of global capitalism. (141)

[21] Guy Fawkes – with a number of co-conspirators – attempted to blow up the House of Lords in London in order to assassinate King James the First and a number of parliamentarians in protest of continued religious intolerance. After he was caught and executed, Fawkes's effigy became a key component in a carnivalesque celebration – Guy Fawkes Night – during which his effigy was regularly burnt. Long held as a symbolic way to shore up the power of the monarch and a reminder of what happens to terrorists and traitors, this night has in more recent history taken on a more neutral quality as Firework Night, having lost much of its link to politics and religion. Also, Fawkes' character has, since the mid-19th century and especially in the wake of *V for Vendetta*, been reimagined as a kind of romantic anarchist hero, and a fighter for justice.

Consequently, while it "might be shapeless and mutable, transformative according to context," the grotesque "will always appeal to an audience. There will always be new frames of reference against which grotesque will swirl and churn, fleetingly take on new bizarre, abnormal and weird forms before returning to normalcy, whereby a new cycle begins" (141 – 142).

More generally, then, the grotesque aesthetic mode exists as a component of both the works of art aimed at a wide audience and those aimed at niche markets, and it is one of the ways in which the above-described work of critique is taken up in the institutional framework of global capitalism. At the same time, as is the case with *V for Vendetta*, this aesthetic mode participates in the constant constructions and destructions of the capitalist axiomatic by which capitalism as an economic process (with deep ramifications in the socio-political spheres) renews and revitalizes itself while maintaining multiplicity and difference within the unified field of its market[22]. This dual dynamic of the grotesque aesthetic mode's functioning takes place almost exclusively on the level of its socio-political expression, where its primary manifestation is that of the carnivalesque – "a world of topsy-turvy, of heteroglot exuberance, of ceaseless overrunning and excess where all is mixed, hybrid, ritually degraded and defiled" (Stallybrass and White 8). Yet, as mentioned above, this logic of excess and of the defiled is today also found at the very core of consumerist capitalism:

[22] As Deleuze and Guattari write, "Are not all modern States isomorphic in relation to the capitalist axiomatic, to the point that the difference between democratic, totalitarian, liberal, and tyrannical States depends only on concrete variables…? [T]here is *only one world market*, the capitalist one. Conversely, does not the world capitalist axiomatic tolerate a real polymorphy, or even a heteromorphy, of models, and for two reasons? On the one hand, capital as general relation of production can very easily integrate concrete sectors or modes of production that are noncapitalist. But on the other hand, and this is the main point, the bureaucratic socialist States can themselves develop different modes of production that only conjugate with capitalism to form a set whose 'power' exceeds that of the axiomatic itself" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 455).

> Dropping *Naked Lunch* and picking up *Thriving on Chaos*, the groundbreaking 1987 management text by Tom Peters, the most popular business writer of the past decade, one finds more philosophical similarities than one would expect from two manifestos of, respectively, dissident culture and business culture. If anything, Peters' celebration of disorder is … bleaker and more nightmarish than Burroughs'. For this popular lecturer on such once-blithe topics as competitiveness and pop psychology there is nothing, absolutely nothing, that is certain. His world is one in which the corporate wisdom of the past is meaningless, established customs are ridiculous, and "rules" are some sort of curse, a remnant of the foolish fifties that exist to be defied, not obeyed. *We live in what Peters calls "A World Turned Upside Down,"* in which whirl is king and, in order to survive, businesses must eventually embrace Peters' universal solution: "*Revolution*!" … Peters even suggests that his readers *implement this hostility to logocentrism in a carnivalesque celebration*, drinking beer out in "the woods" and destroying "all the forms and rules and discontinued reports" and, "if you've got real nerve," a photocopier as well. (Frank 37 – 38, emphases added)

We can here plainly see how both the ethos and the language of Bakhtinian celebrations of the grotesque carnival are absorbed and made productive in an economic context by a managerial style perfectly suited to late capitalism[23].

As Slavoj Žižek points out, this link between the defiled and the spirit of capitalism (which, as Max Weber argues, finds at least some of its *raison d'être* in the ideas and practices

[23] Alan Moore, working with the notorious Sex Pistols manager Malcolm McLaren, Anthony Johnston, and Facundo Percio, explores precisely this issue in his recent *Fashion Beast*, a comic that retells the story of *Beauty and the Beast* set in the world of the fashion industry.

stemming from the Protestant revolution[24]) has been present since capitalism's early days, so that late capitalism has only made it more explicit:

> [The] excremental identification of man [as Divine excretion], the key element of the Protestant revolution, opened the way for two tendencies whose impact is fully felt only today…. [First,] the full scientific-technological naturalization of man: the divine shit [i.e. man] can … be treated as just another phenomenon of natural evolution. Then – less obviously, but perhaps with even greater consequences – *the elevation of enjoyment into a central ethico-political category*: the divine shit is deprived of any "higher" vocation, it is ultimately reduced to a machine oscillating between the search for a homeostatic balance of pleasures and the fatal attraction exerted by some excessive *jouissance* which threatens to disturb this homeostatic balance. (*The Parallax View* 188, emphasis added)

Both the naturalization of man and the elevation of enjoyment into a central tenant of ethics find their ground in a co-optation of the grotesque-carnivalesque category of the scatological with its "ambivalent" – both "joyous and sobering" – "image of excrement" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 175); a category which "play[s] an important role during carnivals" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 147) and which is on the one hand always "linked to the generating forces and to fertility" and on the other

[24] In his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), Weber writes: "The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so. For when asceticism was carried out of monastic cells into everyday life, and began to dominate worldly morality, it did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order. This order is now bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production which today determine the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism, not only those directly concerned with economic acquisition, with irresistible force. Perhaps it will so determine them until the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt. In Baxter's view the care for external goods should only lie on the shoulders of the 'saint like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment.' But fate decreed that the cloak should become an iron cage" (123).

"conceived as something intermediate between earth and body, [between life and death and] as something relating the one to the other" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 175).

In the context of late-stage capitalism, then, in the realm of socio-political expression, the grotesque aesthetic is not in-and-of-itself subversive[25]: it contains "no a priori revolutionary vector" (Stallybrass and White 16) but is, rather, ambiguous. As Stallybrass and White point out, "for long periods, carnival may be a stable and cyclical ritual with no noticeable politically transformative effects but … given the presence of sharpened political antagonism, it may often act as *catalyst* and *site of actual symbolic struggle*" (14). Political antagonism, of course, continues to exist but is, today, attenuated by a liberal-humanist framework that celebrates multicultural diversity and rights of the individual – a "bioethics" encapsulated by the "humanist protection of all living bodies," which are seen as "the only concrete instance for productive individuals aspiring to enjoyment" (Badiou, *Logics* 2)[26]. Buttressed by a recognition of a "plurality of languages" that assumes these languages' juridical equality – as long as they equally participate in this game of mutual recognition – this "democratic materialism … is in the process of becoming the enveloping ideology for this new century" (Badiou, *Logics* 2 – 3) and is based

[25] Despite being (as noted above) *both* an example of "reversal as a temporary respite, the exception stabilizing" the functioning of the dominant order which operates via "constant self-revolutionizing, … reversals, crises, reinventions" (Žižek, *Organs* 212 – 213) *and* an ever-present undercurrent of subversive potential derailing the smooth functioning of the logic of late capitalism, the use of grotesque aesthetics does not automatically establish a work of art as subversive. Rather, it creates certain conditions that can activate (politically, aesthetically, or morally) subversive modes of expression.

[26] This does not, of course, negate the actuality of the fact that all sorts of pleasures are, at times, prohibited to certain individuals. However, even these prohibitions are, I'd like to argue following Badiou, contextualised by the humanist protection of bodies which are seen as deeply related to the act of enjoyment. In other words, a maximizing of individual pleasure that *does not endanger the humanist/ multiculturalist framework of democratic materialism* is always operative, even – or *particularly* – in the instances of prohibition.

on a set of ethical principles rooted in the negative recognition of man as nothing more than "the being who is capable of recognizing himself as a victim" (Badiou, *Ethics* 10)[27].

Consequently, the subversive function of the grotesque aesthetic today relies, minimally, on a dual strategy: that of pairing it up with an appropriate thematic and narrative focus and, more importantly, that of removing its initial import from the realm of political expression and locating it in the realm of ontological content. The subversiveness of the grotesque exists only as an ontological potentiality, activated within the realm of political expression when certain conditions are met. It is only when this ontological content is stressed in the works employing grotesque aesthetics that the subversiveness of the grotesque can today be recognized. In other words, it is only from the level of ontological content that the true ethical aspect of this aesthetic mode can be discerned. And it is only subsequent to this that the subversive nature of particular activations of the grotesque in the socio-political sphere can be deployed. Even so, the ontological content of the grotesque aesthetic mode is, in the context of the discussion of its functioning within the Symbolic, itself affected by the socio-political properties of global capitalism: their relationship therefore needs to be considered dialogically. As Deleuze and Guattari note, "[t]here is never correspondence or conformity" between expression and content. Rather, their relationship is one of "isomorphism with reciprocal presupposition" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 44). The two levels are communicative – they can only be theorized independently

[27] As Badiou elaborates: "Ethics is conceived [today] … as an a priori ability to discern Evil (for according to the modern usage of ethics, Evil – or the negative – is primary: we presume a consensus regarding what is barbarian), and as the ultimate principle of judgement, in particular political judgement: good is what intervenes visibly against an Evil that is recognizable a priori" (*Ethics* 8). Further, "we posit a general human subject, such that whatever evil befalls him is universally identifiable (even if this universality often goes by the altogether paradoxical name of 'public opinion'), such that this subject is both, on the one hand, a passive, pathetic [*pathétique*], or reflexive subject – he who suffers – and, on the other, the active, determining subject of judgement – he who, in identifying suffering, knows that it must be stopped by all available means" (9).

insofar as each is the presupposition of the other. For that reason, "one cannot posit a primacy of expression over content, or content over expression" (87).

Starting with the ontological must here be seen as a strategic – or a political – decision (in the sense of the term taken from François Laruelle[28]) that works jointly with the decision to mine the grotesque's politically progressive potential. This dual decision will allow us to theorize a subversive core of the grotesque as rooted in the historico-empirical datum of it being perceived and used as subversive. Ray Brassier, expanding upon the work of Laruelle, notes that this is the general form of decisional thinking, where a conditioned datum (often empirical or discursive) and its conditioning factum (rational or speculative) form a "fractional structure comprising two differentiated terms and their difference as a third term that is simultaneously intrinsic and

[28] I will take up Laruelle's idea of philosophical Decision in the third and fourth chapters, but here's a brief outline of Laruelle's critique of Decisionism. Elaborating a non-Decisional theory for Decision is one of the fundamental aspects of Laruelle's non-philosophy. It rests on arguing that philosophy in the Western tradition has been not a representation of the Real, but its constituent material component. Philosophy – from before Kant to beyond Deleuze and Badiou – has tried to "refract the Real through itself" (Mullarkey and Smith 1) in order to try to grasp it. Non-philosophy affirms this philosophical endeavour within a broader "set of theoretical forms" – from art to technology to natural science (2) – in the same way in which "[n]on-Euclidian geometries do not negate Euclid's, but affirm it within a broader or amplified paradigm that also explains alternative geometries that are only *apparently* opposed to it" (2). In this sense, non-philosophy presupposes a material Real as its axiom (this can, of course, be interpreted as another Decision), and it uses philosophy as its material in order to affirm its existence and explore it. It does so by "taking the concepts of philosophy and extracting any transcendence from them in order to review them so that they are no longer seen as representations, but re-envisioned as parts of the [material] Real" (2). Human thought is here seen as – *really* rather than logically – immanent to the Real, so as to be "*caused* by the Real" via a wager of "determination-in-the-last-instance" (2). This approach, as Laruelle writes in the context of his analysis of non-photography, is one of "a materiality without materialist *thesis* since every thesis is already given in it" (qtd. in Mullarkey and Smith 3). Here, philosophy "gives for the first time a field of infinite materialities which the … [philosopher] is immediately 'plugged into'" (qtd. in Mullarkey and Smith 3).

extrinsic" ("Axiomatic Heresy" 26)[29]. We will employ a variation of this fractional-decisional structure below and in the following chapters. It will allow us to see contemporary uses of the grotesque as forming a Benjaminian historical constellation with other subversive uses of this aesthetic form in the service of a progressive socio-political agenda. Then, utilising this decisional structure as material, we will also be able to think the grotesque as revealing the realm of the Real as independent of human consciousness: as deeply related to matter as ancestral (Meillassoux) and to the plasticity of time and of the brain (Malabou) which form a unilateral duality with the expression of human subjectivity, whereby the former (external time, the brain) act as the determination-in-the-last-instance of the latter (internal time, subjectivity)[30]. This is, as we will see, the foundation of grotesque's alignment with the ontology and politics of materialism.

The grotesque aesthetic mode is therefore, in Deleuzean terms, the assemblage of which ontological content and socio-political expression are variables (*A Thousand Plateaus* 91). And even though the primary seat of ideology critique today is located on the content (ontological) plane of the grotesque aesthetic mode, this content plane is, like the dialogism of the novel in Bakhtin's conceptualisation, motivated by the expression plane – by "the concrete social context of discourse" which acts as "the force that determines its … structure … from within" (Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" 300). The question of how the grotesque can act as a subversive aesthetic form is, consequently, a question of how the dialogism between it and its socio-political sphere can run in the opposite direction; in other words, how the grotesque, as an aesthetic form

[29] See also Brassier's *Nihil Unbound*, 123 – 127.

[30] For Brassier's explanation of the thinking object (the brain) as determining-in-the-last-instance, see *Nihil Unbound*, 140 – 141.

motivated by its "concrete social context," can utilise the ideology critique that – as discussed above – exists and functions within this very social context in order to, as it were, talk back to its world. Or, again, the question is how the grotesque, as an aesthetic form that is a part of the socio-political sphere from which it receives its impetus, can effectuate a critique of this very same sphere. In order to explore this possibility we need to start, for the reasons explained above, with this aesthetic mode's "ontological programme" (Badiou, *Ethics* 129) and the way this programme conditions the grotesque to function within its social context.

The "ontological programme" operative on the content plane of the grotesque aesthetic mode is, strictly speaking, the programme of "gather[ing] up what remains to thought once we abandon the predicative, particular determinations of 'that which is presented'" (Badiou, *Ethics* 129). Within his system, for example, Badiou concludes that "what remains is mathematics," or Cantor's set theory (130). Žižek, for his part, argues that what remains is the void: the *objet petit a* as "the original lost [material] object which … coincides with its own loss" (*The Sublime Object* 178) and that "emerges out of an originally corporeal condition as its anterior ground, although, once generated," it "remains irreducible to its material sources" (Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology* xxiv). The grotesque, on the other hand, suggests that what remains after we abandon the particularities of the presented is *the positive, affirmative, and substantial relation* that exists among the multiples of the corporeal world. In a move similar to Žižek's, this relation materializes out of an originally corporeal condition in order to become transcendental to it; it is, in this sense, similar to Deleuzean "absolute immanence" that is "in itself" and "not in something [nor] *to* something," that "does not depend on an object or belong to a subject" (*Pure Immanence* 26) and that, even though it emanates from a corporeal reality, subsequently becomes irreducible to its material origin. This is another dialogic relationship, between the material and the

ontological in which the material/matter always comes first (i.e. we must start with it) but is *not*, thus, somehow primary or sovereign. Indeed, the material and the ontological are another example of content and expression – which are always isomorphic with reciprocal presupposition – whose relation Badiou theorises as the relation between the ontologico-mathematical "multiple-being" and the logic or "stability of [material] worlds" (*Logics* 101). In other words, it is only with the ontological that the material receives full consistency: functioning as that "which retroactively opens up its own possibility" (Žižek, *The Parallax View* 203) – what Žižek calls "the moment of ontological openness" (203) – the ontological content that the grotesque reveals can only be derived from the corporeal but is, at the same time, that which gives the corporeal its basic fabric or texture. (As we will see below, in the discussion of multiplicities and the grotesque, Badiou's insight into the importance of the "stability of [material] worlds" is critical in the functioning of the grotesque: while Deleuze's understanding of multiplicities stresses their continual decomposition (i.e. deterritorialization) in the play between the actual and the virtual, Badiou insists that what matters and is worth struggling for is the composition of provisional but definable multiplicities which are composed of sets composed of other sets and are, hence, groundless, and which in their composition open up questions of ethics and politics.)

In order to arrive at the comprehension of the nature of the ontological content of the grotesque, we need, then, to start at an – in one sense – arbitrary point: *in medias res*. Since the relationship of content and expression is always one of mutual presupposition/determination, and since neither can be conceived in terms other than that of their "functional independence" that is "only the form of their reciprocal presupposition, and of the continual passage from one to the other" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 87), one can, in a way, start nowhere but *in medias res*. Predicated on "an open equation: …+ $y + z + a$ +…" that "synthesizes a multiplicity

of elements without effacing their heterogeneity or hindering their potential for future rearranging" (Massumi, "Translator's Foreword" xiii), this content-expression (ontology-corporeality) system is another example of disjunctive synthesis motivated by the conjunction 'AND,' a conjunction which in this system becomes "the atypical expression of all of the possible conjunctions it places in continuous variation" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 99). Irreducible to either a constant or a variable, AND – what Deleuze and Guattari call a "tensor" – "assures the variation of the variable by subtracting in each instance the value of the constant (*n – 1*)" (99). No point in this system is, thus, privileged over another, and any point is as good a launching pad for analysis as any other.

Bacon Crumble

Let us then start with an arbitrary example of the grotesque that will, hopefully, clarify the theoretical framework briefly developed in previous paragraphs. Because there is no exact and exhaustive definition of the grotesque, the use of a somewhat arbitrary example to develop the principles of grotesque ontology may seem to be a case of circular logic. Yet aside from being a pragmatic way to insert this analysis into "the middle" from which the grotesque (as a kind of Deleuzean rhizome) "grows and which it overspills" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 21), we can here also call on historical analyses of the concept's use in order to extract a kind of (admittedly academic and somewhat 'aristocratic') consensus. According to this consensus, one of the most recognisable features of grotesque art is its purposive and deeply physical de-formation of *the human body*. We have seen how this focus is the bearer of grotesque's historical gendering and the marker of its disjunctive synthesis and resulting political ambiguity. Although not directly engaging with masculine or feminine grotesques in any overt way, the two examples used below

– R. Crumb's "Stoned Agin" and Francis Bacon's *Second Version of Triptych 1944* – testify to the way in which this tradition is always caught up in questions of gender and sexuality as both Crumb's and Bacon's work is often associated with performances of masculinity.

Crumb's cartoons often explicitly depict misogyny (and racism) directly, and his frank representations of his own sexual frustrations and fantasies have often led to accusations of misogyny aimed directly at the author. At the very least, his work is a very good example of how the grotesque always teeters on the border between critical elaboration and exploitation. Bacon's is a more subtle case. His explorations of homosexuality in a staunchly heterosexist family/society make him a more sympathetic figure than Crumb and, as Ernst van Alphen notes, his work is most often seen as "working against a stereotypical discourse of masculinity" and as a "deconstruction of 'mortifying' images of" this tradition (174). By depicting male nudes, Bacon also aims to "disempower[ ] the tradition of objectification of women" (169). Yet it is impossible not to notice a simultaneous fetishization of strong, male bodies and of violence in his work. As Lucian Freud, Bacon's long-time friend and fellow artist, noted of his personal life, Bacon continually "complained that he spent the whole of his life looking for the roughest, most masculine men that he could find" (qtd. in Gayford), and one could make an argument that this pursuit bled into his work. Illustrating this point, Friedhelm Mennekes notes that it is the body of Bacon's friend George Dyer that inspired much of his work as Dyer "embodied the type of masculinity that Bacon always sought for his images: athletic, vital, dominant."

These specific socio-political questions – of gender, sexuality, race, and their relationship to aesthetics – are thus always a part of the more general elaboration of the grotesque through the human body, to which we now return. Already commented upon during the first century BCE by one of the earliest detractors of this aesthetic mode, Vitruvius, who criticises "these falsehoods"

– representations of, among other things, "monsters" and "slender stalks with heads of men and animals attached to half the body" (qtd. in Harpham 30) – the grotesque art most often performs its aesthetic play on the surface of the human form. As Ralf Remshardt notes, "If there is a single place in and upon which the grotesque sensually manifests its contradictions and to which it returns even in its most sophisticated form, it is the body – not the body of mythical beasts, but the human body" (31). Similarly, Bakhtin singles out the human body as the privileged site of what he sees as the politically subversive grotesque-carnivalesque; and Mary Russo, in her study of *The Female Grotesque*, argues that "the late Renaissance and baroque combinations of depth and surface models of the body resurface in the twentieth century to produce the spectacular category of female grotesque" (6) which forms an important aspect of contemporary feminist discourses such as Cixous's *écriture féminine*, within which the female body is imagined as "the body without beginning and without end" (Cixous, qtd. in Russo 67). As discussed above, Kristeva and Creed see the maternal body as the epitome of abjection in Western culture.

Starting with an example, to return to our previous concern, will have an added benefit of allowing us to broach this subject via what Žižek calls "total externalization" through which one "renounce[s] even the last bit of any kind of initiated closed circuit of knowledge" in favour of something more 'egalitarian,' in favour of what Lacan calls *passe*[31], "the passage of analysand into the analyst" (Žižek, "Connections" 56), a surrender of one's place of authority in exchange for a more complete truth. Let us then start with a somewhat arbitrary example of the grotesque. Let us start "face to face with the work of art in the form of a 'here is what there is'" (Rancière, "Deleuzian Aesthetics" 2). Let us start with R. Crumb and Francis Bacon.

[31] For an elaboration of Lacan's concept of *passe*, see Jacques-Alain Miller's "Another Lacan," which can be found at http://www.lacan.com/thesymptom/?p=1

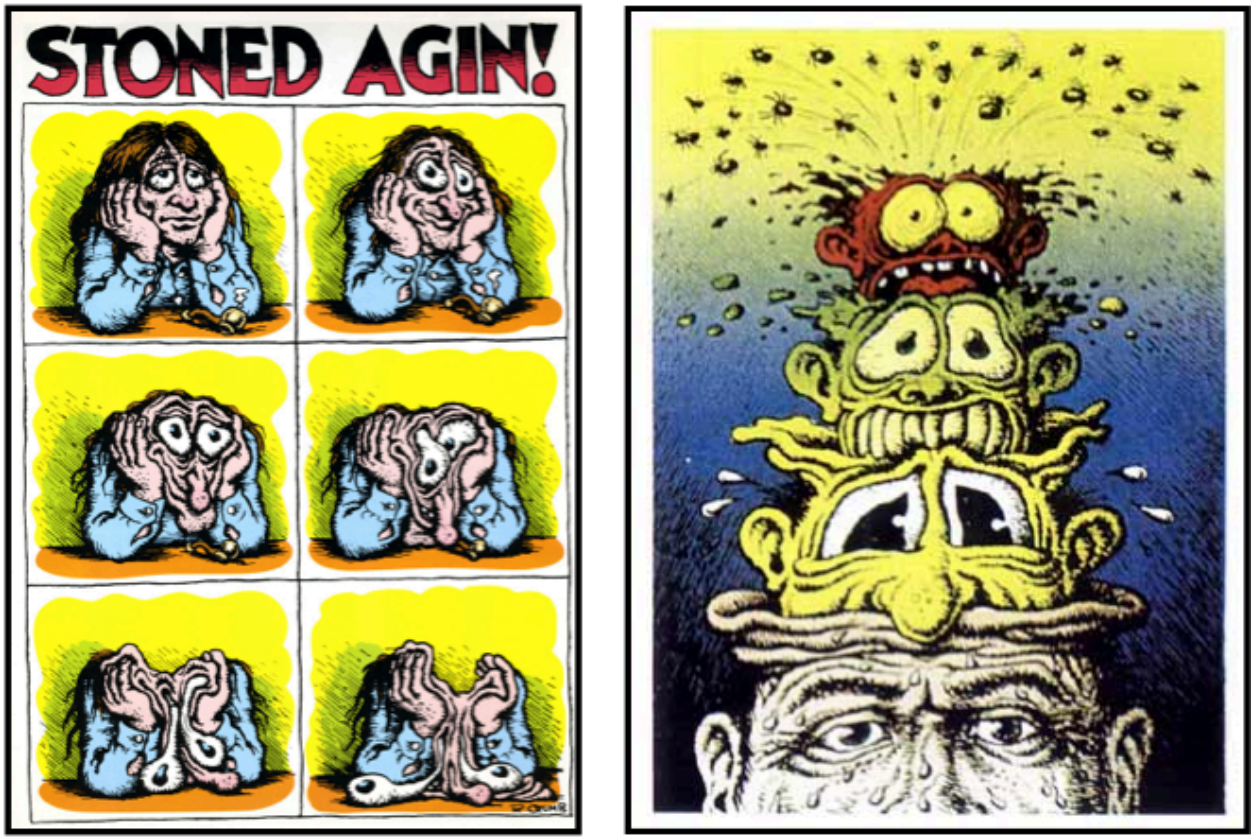


Figure 4: The Comic Art of R. Crumb

R. Crumb (b. 1943), whom Robert Hughes, art critic for *Time* magazine, has called "the Brueghel of the last half of the twentieth century" (*Crumb*)[32] is best known as one of the founders of the underground comics scene in the late 1960s USA. Featured in the Whitney Museum of American Art's 1969 exhibit entitled "Human Concern/Personal Torment: The Grotesque in American Art" (Holm xvii), Crumb's work is "obsessed with grotesque bodies and coarse, unorthodox, disturbing representations of the world" as it "emphasise[s] orifices and protuberances, [while] his stories involve stretching, squishing, entangling, exploding bodies" (Tinker 33).

[32] Hughes, interviewed for Terry Zwigoff's documentary, continues: "[Crumb] gives you that tremendous kind of impaction of lusting, suffering, crazed humanity in all sorts of bizarre, gargoyle-like, allegorical forms. He's … got this very powerful imagination which goes right over the top a lot of the times, but it very seldom lies" (*Crumb*).

Figure 5: Francis Bacon's *Second Version of Triptych 1944* (1988)

Francis Bacon (1909 – 1992), on the other hand, is "one of the most original painters of … [the twentieth] century" known for his "figural leanings" (Smith vii) and for his penchant for "a very special [kind of] violence" (Deleuze, *Francis Bacon* xxix):

> Bacon, to be sure, often traffics in the violence of a depicted scene: spectacles of horror, Crucifixions, prostheses and mutilations, monsters. But these are overly facile detours, detours that the artist himself judges severely and condemns in his work. What directly interests him is a violence that is involved only with colour and line: the violence of a sensation (and not of a representation), a static or potential violence, a violence of reaction and expression. … The violence of a hiccup, of a need to vomit, but also of a hysterical, involuntary smile. … Bacon's bodies, heads, Figures, are of flesh, and what fascinates him are the invisible forces that model flesh or shake it. This is not the relationship of form and matter, but of materials and forces; [and Bacon's goal is] to make these forces visible through their effects on flesh. (Deleuze, *Francis Bacon* xxix)

Despite Deleuze's judgement that physical deformations in Bacon are nothing but facile detours, the violence of sensation represented in Bacon, as the violence represented in Crumb, is

ultimately that of the flesh: even if it does lean away from the violence of representation and toward that of sensation, Bacon's and Crumb's uses of both colour/line *and* deformed bodies "provide[ ] us with … a metamorphosis of the reality [they are] portraying" in a manner which closely echoes Wolfgang Kayser's elaboration of the grotesque (Yates 150). (We should here remind ourselves that while Deleuze accentuates the continual decomposition of matter in the play between the actual and the virtual, the grotesque recognizes this aspect of the play of multiplicities while also functioning within a kind of (speculative) realist framework. In this way, the grotesque continually supplements this decomposition with the composition of provisional but definable multiplicities, a composition of form, insisting that structure persists and is not simply surpassed by proliferating series via the logic of disjunctive synthesis.)

Both Crumb's comic/low art and Bacon's figural/high art are, as examples of grotesque aesthetics, "corporeal smears, discharges of energy;" they are "hybridized, mutated forms that express the instinctive, somatic activity of the body beyond the control of intellectual will," forms which "subvert anthropocentric and rational response" (Newman 211). As such, not only do they "ruptur[e] rhetorical and narrative unity" (211), they – to a significant degree – elide narrative logic by exerting their primary effects as "moment[s]" in art "manifested in … [a textual or a visual] *event*" (Barasch, "The Grotesque" 4, emphasis added). Crumb's depiction of exploding heads stacked within one another *à la matryoshka* doll, for example, may carry a symbolic implication, but its primary impact is neuro-visual. Rather than imposing or evoking a cerebral or intellectual reading/interpretation, Crumb's heads provoke mixed physical and emotional reactions which "occur simultaneously, producing in the reader a confused and uneasy tension between laughter and fear or disgust" (Barasch, "The Grotesque" 4).

Crumb and Bacon both testify to this function of their art by commenting on their methods of production, methods that often deemphasize the role of rational processes in favour of something more bodily. So, while Bacon notes that he tries "to make images as accurately off [his] nervous system as [he] can" (qtd. in Newman 210), Crumb highlights the creative and "fuzzy state of mind" produced in him by his use of LSD in the mid to late 1960s:

> A whole new thing was emerging in my drawings [during this "fuzzy acid phase"], a sort of harkening back, a calling up of what [Gershon] Legman had called the 'horror-squinky' forces lurking in American comics of the 1940s. I had no control over it. The whole time I was in this fuzzy state of mind, the separation, the barrier betwixt the conscious and the subconscious was broken open somehow. A grotesque kaleidoscope, a tawdry carnival of disassociated images kept sputtering to the surface… especially if I was sitting and staring, which I often did. (qtd. in Tinker 40)

In both Crumb's and Bacon's works, then, what we see is a breakdown of rational, narrative logic and a deployment of visual events which, primarily, provoke bodily reactions in the observer rather than intellectual curiosity or interpretation (this, of course, does not completely eliminate intellectual interpretation, attempts of which inevitably come after the fact).

Even a grotesque sequential comic composed of multiple panels, such as Crumb's "Stoned Agin," acts less according to a narrative logic and more as a representation of a visual event. While not quite a juxtaposition of images ordered according to the logic of disjunctive synthesis that Bacon's *Triptych* is, "Stoned Agin" is a representation of a segment or a bracket of time unified by the materiality of its central image. Firstly, its use of "moment-to-moment transition" between panels[33] (McCloud 70) – a type of transition very rarely used in comics

[33] See Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*, 70 – 93.

whose main purpose is to tell a narrative – signals this comic's non-narrative concerns. Furthermore, the virtual inexistence of gutters, the space between images where the reader does most of the work necessary to provide narrative "closure" to the comics' "fracture[d] … time and space" that offers "a jagged, staccato rhythm of unconnected moments" (McCloud 67), also signals the non-narrative concerns of this sequential strip. Rather, Crumb's comic functions according to the logic of Bergsonian duration which is "in the final analysis, defined less by [temporal] succession than by coexistence" (Deleuze, *Bergsonism* 60). In other words, the concentration of materiality represented by the sheer weight of the man's melting form along with this strip's formal aspects (i.e. transition and lack of gutters, texturing and the use of line and colour which stress the materiality of the image) act as if to prevent the flow of linear time. This virtual "contemporaneity" of successive images in Crumb's strip "[n]ot only … [causes] the past [to] coexist with the present that has been, but, as it preserves itself in itself (while the present passes), it [becomes] the whole, integral past; it is *all* our past, which coexists with each present" (Deleuze, *Bergsonism* 59). In a sense then, "Stoned Agin" exists dually: on the one hand, it is a sort of filmic representation of a brief moment during which we witness a metamorphosis of the human form (this is stressed via its intensely filmic moment-to-moment transition). On the other hand, all the images (all the different moments) exist together: at the same time, on the same visual plane. In this way, further stressed by the materiality of visual space, this comic is an elaboration of the logic of grotesque aesthetics: (filled) space is stressed over narrative time so that the work of art's "moment[s]" are "manifested in … [a textual or a visual] event" that causes, as pointed out above, mixed physical and emotional reactions to occur simultaneously[34].

[34] As a consequence, no narrative can be grotesque in its entirety: it can be driven by grotesque moments that

Similarly, Bacon's *Second Version of Triptych 1944* operates beyond a narrative logic of certain types of visual art[35], embodying instead a kind of figural logic played out through the image of the de-formed human body, a logic that is "connected to a sensation, and that conveys the violence of this sensation directly to the nervous system" (Smith xiii). As Deleuze points out, the "isolation [of Bacon's Figures] is … the simplest means, necessary though not sufficient, to break with representation, to disrupt narration, to escape illustration, to liberate the Figure: to stick to the fact" (Deleuze, *Francis Bacon* 6). In this way, the *Triptych* escapes the logic of "form and matter" and embodies the logic of "materials and forces" (*Francis Bacon* xxix). As in Crumb's work, these forces act from within the body and are of the body: the goal is always "to make these forces visible through their effects on flesh" as they "climb through [this] flesh" (xxix)[36]. The materiality of these Figures is equally evident in their backgrounds, which are "all around [them], and are thus grasped in a close view, a tactile or 'haptic' view, just as the

---

most often exist in isolation and – if utilised frequently enough – produce a kind of "grotesque logic" of a work of art.

[35] Narrative painting has existed and continues to exist in numerous schools and periods – e.g. *The Oxford Dictionary of Art and Artists* notes, "Narrative paintings in the neoclassical style often take subjects from classical literature" (Morgan, "Neoclassicism" 336) – and can easily incorporate grotesque elements in it. However, as in literature, these elements are only moments within a larger work, they are events that contribute to the overall theme of a painting. A grotesque image or painting is, however, always anarrative in a sense that its primary effect is a physical and/or emotional one and its narrative place is secondary.

[36] As I will discuss in chapter 4 of this work, grotesque *representations* of the body (*qua* representations) are intimately linked with the *actuality* of concrete, material bodies. The power of grotesque art can be located in its ability to always evoke both the concept of the decomposition of the material body in the spectator/reader, as well as what Ralf Remshardt calls the image of "the body intact" (261) – a 'normal' body that is both an image and is *mine*. This is directly the result of the grotesque's continual focus on both decomposition *and* composition through which we are constantly reminded that structure persists, just as *our own body persists*. Again, I will discuss this in more detail in Chapter 4.

Figure[s]" themselves are (8). In other words, all the elements of the *Triptych* – the Figures, the backgrounds, and the props that support them – are made subservient to the forces de-forming the filled space from within.

As in Crumb's work, these forces are figured as nothing but the sheer weight of the bodies themselves. In a sense, then, *there is nothing in the grotesque as figured in Crumb's and Bacon's works other than the material/corporeal and its relationship to itself.* The forces that de-form the imaged bodies are, as is the relationship between the corporeal and the ontological, of the body yet at the same time separate from it and transcendental to it. These forces also "emerge[ ] out of an originally corporeal condition as its anterior ground, although, once generated, " they "thereafter remain[ ] irreducible to [their] material sources" (Johnston xxiv). Indeed, these two relationships are one and the same: *the forces that transform the corporeal from within are the eruption of the ontological into the phenomenal world*. Highlighted by the sheer visual corporeality of the Figures – the wrinkles, blemishes, pen-stroke texturisation, and emanations from the body such as sweat and (in other instances) semen, vomit, and faeces in Crumb's case, and the solidity of colour and shading, realistic, almost photographic representation of body parts (e.g. teeth), and the material sturdiness of objects propping the Figures in Bacon's case – Crumb's and Bacon's utilisation of the grotesque reveals this aesthetic mode's basic characteristics.

In these works, the corporeal is primary, and most often – if not always – the corporeal is strictly equated with the human body. De-formed from within in order to image "monsters from the point of view of figuration" (Deleuze, *Francis Bacon* xxxiii), these corporeal objects also, through their de-formation, "render visible forces that are not themselves visible" (48). These forces, however, emanate from the Figures themselves. They are of the body *and*, at the same

time, transcendental to it (i.e. they are ontological). In order to establish this relationship between the material and its forces, grotesque aesthetics as utilised by Crumb and Bacon (and this, as we shall see, is the general make-up of the grotesque) flattens time into Bergsonian duration within which past and present are "two elements which coexist" (Deleuze, *Bergsonism* 59). As such, the grotesque cannot be sustained over a period of (linear) time. Rather, it – even in cases in which it is employed in serial art like Crumb's or in a triptych like Bacon's, or even in textual narrative – always exists as an evental and momentary eruption of matter, of fully-filled space. The grotesque, therefore, often employs parataxis and/or juxtaposition, and it always functions via the logic of disjunctive synthesis. In this way, by flattening time into a plane of duration, and by privileging matter-filled space, the grotesque executes a "leap into ontology," an act which Deleuze, translating Bergson via free indirect discourse, summarises as follows:

> Only the present is "psychological"; but the past is pure ontology; pure recollection has only ontological significance. … There is … a "past in general" that is not the particular past of a particular present but that is like an ontological element, a past that is eternal and for all time, the condition of the "passage" of every particular present. It is the past in general that makes possible all pasts. According to Bergson, we first put ourselves back into the past in general: He describes in this way the *leap into ontology*. We really leap into being, into being-in-itself, into the being in itself of the past. It is a case of leaving psychology altogether. It is a case of an immemorial or ontological Memory. It is only then, once the leap has been made, that recollection will gradually take on a psychological existence: "from the virtual it passes into the actual state…." We have had to search at the place where it is, in impassive Being, and gradually we give it an embodiment, a "psychologization." (*Bergsonism* 56 – 57).

Via a similar process, the grotesque always executes a "leap into ontology," into the Being not of time, but of the corporeal World(s). It utilises matter to reveal within it matter's own *forces of metamorphosis and plasticity*, showing that after we abandon the "particular determinations of 'that which is presented'" (Badiou, *Ethics* 129) what we have left is *the positive, affirmative, and substantial relation* existing among the multiples of the corporeal world. This, in other words, is the positive, affirmative, and substantial relation of matter to itself.

Grotesque's Ontological Programme

So what exactly is the nature of this relation? What is the nature of the ontological as revealed by the grotesque aesthetic mode? In his *Being and Event*, Badiou argues that ontology is mathematics as "the theory of inconsistent multiplicities as such" (28). In any consistent theory of the ontological, he argues, "[w]hat is required is that the operational structure of ontology discern the multiple *without having to make a one out of it*" (29, emphasis added). Using Georg Cantor's (1845 – 1918) set theory as the foundation of his ontology, Badiou further argues that "that which is" is not only "uniformly pure multiplicity" (44) but is also always "in excess of the coherency of … language" (45):

> The power of language does not go so far as to institute the 'there is' of the 'there is.' It confines itself to posing that there are some distinctions within the 'there is.' The principles differentiated by Lacan may be remarked therein: that of the real (there is) and that of the symbolic (there are some distinctions). (Badiou, *Being and Event* 47)

The 'there is' to which the grotesque points to, on the other hand, is – despite the important fact that it also transcends the power of language – not mathematical but corporeal-relational. As the

last two chapters will discuss, the grotesque thus allows us to – via discourse and human consciousness – think a realm independent of these.

If we think back to Crumb's and Bacon's works, we can, first of all, note that within what is clearly a multiplicity on the corporeal or figural level – teeth, mouth, face, eyes that compose what Bergson calls *quantitative* multiplicity[37] that is homogenous and spatio-coporeal and which "is got by unfolding in space" (Bergson 120) – we can discern an existence of a de-forming Force (abstract and singular). Even here, however, within this apparent unity of Force, multiplicity reigns: the violences that de-form Crumb's and Bacon's Figures are never *in singular* (although they are singularities); they are "the violence[s] of a hiccup, of a need to vomit, but also of a hysterical, involuntary smile" (Deleuze, *Francis Bacon* xxix) that can burst open a skull, rupture skin, melt a form, or create new (smiling, gaping, toothy) configurations of flesh. This multiplicity is what Bergson calls *qualitative*: "heterogeneous (or singularized), continuous (or interpenetrating), oppositional (or dualistic) at the extremes, and progressive (or temporal, an irreversible flow, which is not given all at once)" (Lawlor and Moulard). Unlike qualitative multiplicity, multiplicity that reigns on the level of the corporeal can, and often does, produce temporary coherence: it can, "under certain conditions, be synthesized (enveloped), and therefore be ascribed a unity other than the one that counts its pure multiplicity as one" (Badiou,

[37] Describing the difference between quantitative and qualitative multiplicity, Leonard Lawlor and Valentine Moulard paraphrase Bergson's best-known example of quantitative multiplicity in the following way: "In *Time and Free Will*, we find several examples of a quantitative multiplicity; the example of a flock of sheep is perhaps the easiest to grasp (*Time and Free Will*, pp. 76-77). When we look at a flock of sheep, what we notice is that they all look alike. Thus a quantitative multiplicity is always homogeneous. But also, we notice that we can enumerate the sheep, despite their homogeneity. We are able to enumerate them because each sheep is spatially separated from or juxtaposed to the others; in other words, each occupies a discernable spatial location. Therefore, quantitative multiplicities are homogeneous and spatial. Moreover, because a quantitative multiplicity is homogeneous, we can represent it with a symbol, for instance, a sum: '25.'"

Logics of World 196). This aspect of the quantitative multiplicity is crucial for the grotesque, as it is what forms the above-mentioned body intact, which the grotesque body is always doubled by and upon which it relies for its effect. Yet, at the same time, these syntheses are always temporary and tactical; they are "always local" (Badiou, *Logics of World* 112) and each world they give rise to (with its physical multiplicities) is subject to reconstitution. Most importantly, these syntheses are given coherence and 'relationality' only by vectors of *qualitative multiplicity* which is the only kind of multiplicity that can establish a relation: while quantitative multiplicity is established by a simple act of counting (i.e. homogenous elements are apposed paratactically), it is qualitative multiplicity which provides the possibility of creating a relation beyond that of parataxis, doing so as a force of change acting within short bursts of time.

On both the level of expression (the level of bodies, material objects) and on the level of content (the ontological level of relations) what we witness, then, is multiplicities. And while on the level of expression these multiplicities are embodied (synthesised or enveloped, striated or territorialised), on the level of content they are "pre-individual and impersonal singularities" (Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* 297) emanating from the corporeal yet transcending it. As such, these singularities are

> mobile, communicating, penetrating one another across an infinity of degrees and an infinity of modifications. [They create a] fascinating world where the identity of the self is lost, not to the benefit of the identity of the One or the unity of the Whole, but to the advantage of an intense multiplicity and a power of metamorphosis, where relations of force play within one another. (Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* 297)

As noted earlier, these singularities are in Crumb's and Bacon's works expressed as vectors of force which de-form flesh. They are forces of matter acting upon itself, forces that make bodies

convulse, melt, warp, and misshape under matter's own weight, but which are *other than* the bodies that they de-form.

We see here again the mutual presupposition between the corporeal and the ontological. Matter is multiple by virtue of being counted, by being homogenous yet "spatially separated from or juxtaposed" to other matter (Lawlor and Moulard), and by virtue of its relationship to the ontological-qualitative multiplicity: "A multiple being which bears … [the] subjective formalism" of the ontological, writes Badiou, "and thereby makes it appear in a world, receives the name of 'body' – without ascribing to this body any organic status" (*Logics of Worlds* 453). At the same time, as noted above, the ontological emanates from the corporeal as the relation of matter to itself and is thereby transformed into qualitative multiplicity: singular, heterogeneous, and progressive/temporal. Moreover, this qualitative multiplicity retroactively inserts itself into the realm of quantitative multiplicity, creating a ground of its own possibility while also allowing for existence of relationality in the corporeal realm. 'Evental bodies' are, therefore – in Badiou's use of the term – collectives of elements of "a site," which can be defined as a slice of the world where the new or "the inexistent starts to exist maximally" (*Logics of Worlds* 459). Hence, the human form with which the grotesque primarily concerns itself is a type of body through which singularities can bring forth 'the inexistent[38]' without ever fully eradicating the structure of the body, which persists. The human form, then, in its de-formation becomes an *event-site* where "the ontologically vanquished becomes the living victor" and where "the empty excluded of the place" gives way to "a body capable of breaking the 'pensive form' of its submission" (*Logics of Worlds* 459) "independently … of [the existence of] subject[s]" (*Logics of Worlds* 193). As we will see in more detail in Chapter 4, however, the working of this event-site always invokes the

[38] The majority of the chapters of this work will concern themselves with an exploration of the possibility of this eventuality.

body intact: precisely because it is so focused on corporeality, the grotesque is always working within a kind of realist framework where form persists, even though this form is continually mutating. Or, as Remshardt puts it, "the grotesque's impieties are always the clandestine reflection of pieties, its criminality not a rejection but an invocation of the laws it violates. The deformed body is always doubled by the body intact" (261).

The mutual presupposition between the two kinds of multiplicity (quantitative and qualitative), finally, gives us a second-order relation, a kind of relation of relation that operates as a type of logic or governing principle of the two kinds of multiplicity. This MULTIPLICITY exists on both the levels of content and of expression, and is "atomic" – it is a "quilting point[ ] of appearing within being" (*Logics of Worlds* 218) that stitches the ontological to the corporeal. Yet, at the same time, it "must be made, not by always adding a higher dimension, but rather in the simplest of ways, by dint of sobriety, with the number of dimensions one already has available—always $n - 1$ (the only way the one belongs to the multiple: always subtracted)" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 6). "A multiplicity," notes Deleuze, " is never in terms, however many there are, nor in their set of totality." He continues: "A multiplicity is only in the AND, which does not have the same nature as the elements, the sets or even their relations […]. The AND has a fundamental sobriety, a poverty, an ascesis" (qtd. in Hallward 154 – 155); to which Peter Hallward adds: "The AND is not itself properly a relation at all but rather the sufficient and animating principle of all relations" (155). In this way – by animating all relations – MULTIPLICITY retroactively imbues and permeates the corporeal as well as the ontological as their "animating principle." This kind of MULTIPLICITY is the third term in the triad corporeal-ontological-MULTIPLICITY, and it emerges as the product of the second-order relation between the corporeal and the ontological (the first-order relation being the one of matter to itself which

gives rise to the ontological). This third term is multiplicity in its narrowest sense: a principle which emerges as the final step in a chain of relations of: a) matter to itself, which gives rise to the ontological, and b) the corporeal *qua* quantitative multiplicity to the ontological *qua* qualitative multiplicity, which gives rise to it (MULTIPLICITY).

It is, finally, this third term, MULTIPLICITY, that gives rise to *univocity* cutting across both the ontological and the corporeal. As Peter Hallward notes, quoting Deleuze,

> [W]hile multiplicity may … appear to be the privileged if not exclusive dimension of Deleuze's ontology, we must not forget that multiplicity is always also 'the inseparable manifestation, essential transformation and constant symptom of unity. Multiplicity is the affirmation of unity' and 'the affirmation of multiplicity is itself one.' What unifies difference or multiplicity is not a principle of internal sameness or order but rather the absoluteness of difference itself, its refusal of limitation or externality. Everything divides into itself, but the 'self' of infinite self-division is itself indivisible. (17)

In the same vein, Massumi writes of the paradox that subsists with the co-existence of and relationships between the multiplicity of "sites and substances," the duality of "formations" which takes these materials (sites and substances) up, and the "monism of matter":

> Each of these levels is real. The multiplicity is a real heterogeneity of sites and substances. The duality is a real distinction between the overpowered and overpowering formations those materials are taken up in. The unity is a real "diagram" enveloping the real dynamism of a duality and depositing it, perchance, on a page. The unity is something else again: the real monism of matter. For there is only one world, one nature, and – below the quantum level of matter and beyond the synapses of our brains – one unified field. Which never ceases to divide into a multiplicity of singular elements and

> composite materials, into dualities of content and expression, into unifying conceptual and linguistic contractions. The unity is before, as "cause," lost in the gritty "depths" of the genesis of matter, and it is after, as "effect," evaporating in the "sterile" atmosphere of thought and language. It is twice. In between: the future-past event of meaning. Meaning as local fissure and cosmic contraction. Paradox and the laughter of the gods. (*A User's Guide* 21)

It is not, however, the "monism of matter" that the grotesque ultimately points to, even though it presupposes it (in the original evocation of the ontological from the corporeal). It, rather, points to *univocity* of the multiple, of multiplicity, which does not function on the substantial level of either the ontological or the corporeal. Rather, the univocity resides in the relation between the two, as a second-order relation and an animating principle of the World(s) composed of the corporeal and the ontological and their relations. It is for this reason that univocity is at the same time *of both the ontological and the corporeal and, at the same time, of neither of those two*: "There are not two 'paths,' as Parmenides' poem suggests, but a single 'voice' of Being, which includes all its modes, including the most diverse, the most varied, the most differenciated [*sic*]. Being is said in a single and same sense of everything of which it is said, but that of which it is said differs: it is said of difference itself" (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 36). This "difference itself" is nothing but the logic of MULTIPLICITY emanating from the relation between the corporeal as multiplicity and the ontological as multiplicity. MULTIPLICITY is, in other words, the "third term that is simultaneously intrinsic and extrinsic" to the "fractional structure comprising two differentiated terms [corporeal as datum and ontological as factum] and their difference" (Brassier, "Axiomatic" 26): it is an index of the grotesque philosophical decision. This relation is thus not strictly transcendental to the terms out of which it emanates. Rather, it is

immanent to these terms (i.e. to the corporeal and the ontological) even as it transcends them. Univocity exists as the retroactively formed ground upon which ontological and corporeal multiplicities function, as the logic of both the ontological and the corporeal.

Thinking back to Crumb's and Bacon's works, we can note that MULTIPLICITY does not leave traces upon the flesh: if it was transcendental to the relation between the corporeal and the ontological, it would necessarily do so. As "the voice" with which the relation between the corporeal and the ontological and with which the corporeal and the ontological themselves are spoken, it does not affect what is said in a material way (it does so, of course, as a process rather than the end product, and it is discernible as a process, a kind of substantial, processual "ghost in the machine"). Echoing Bakhtin's characterisation of the novel[39], this organizing principle/ voice does not negate the heteroglossia of what there is. It, rather, says Being "in a single and same sense of everything of which it is said, but that of which it is said differs" (*Difference and Repetition* 36): it allows for there to be multiplicity (qualitative and quantitative). Therefore, as Deleuze writes, "Univocal Being inheres in language [expression] and happens to things [content]; it measures the internal relation of language with the external relation of Being. Neither active nor passive, univocal Being is neutral. It is *extra-Being*, that is, the minimum of being common to the real, the possible, and the impossible" (*Logic of Sense* 180).

Finally, the process out of which MULTIPLICITY arises inserts *the necessary minimum burst of time* into the functioning of the grotesque which, as we will see in Chapter 4, has

[39] Bakhtin writes of the heteroglossia in the novel: "The stylistic uniqueness of the novel as a genre consists precisely in the combination of these subordinated, yet still relatively autonomous, unities (even at times comprised of different languages) into the higher unity of the work as a whole: the style of a novel is to be found in the combination of its styles; the language of a novel is the system of its 'languages.' … The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized" ("Discourse in the Novel" 262).

considerable import for the functioning of this aesthetic form beyond its revealing of the ontological as decisional. The process of the rise of the ontological-qualitative multiplicity from the corporeal-quantitative one – from the human form as a multiplicity of bones, organs, tissues – determines qualitative multiplicity as a continuous and progressive force (a kind of 'life force' of matter) which retroactively inserts (the brief burst of) the temporal necessary for the metamorphosis or de-formation of the human form. If we, once again, think back to Crumb's and Bacon's works, we can note how Crumb's depiction of burst heads *à la matryoshka* doll presupposes (and retroactively inserts as its precondition) a kind of 'normal' human head awaiting de-formation: a Badiouian composed multiplicity worth struggling for. Similarly, the melting of the human form in "Stoned Agin," while positing Bergsonian duration as a coexistence of past and present moments, also evokes (via the moment-to-moment transition between its six images) a fleeting temporal dimension that forms a retroactively inserted precondition on which metamorphosis takes place. In other words, grotesque aesthetic mode is an inherently *ethical* aesthetic form, as, again, "its impieties are always the clandestine reflection of pieties, its criminality not a rejection but an invocation of the laws it violates" (Remshardt 261). As productive of an ethical event, the grotesque is an aesthetic form that is inherently political and intimately related to – or parasitical of – cultural norms, both legal and conventional, which it typically tries to degrade and transcend at the same time.

The different ways the grotesque does this, however, are based on a strictly ontological procedure: every de-formed body depicted in a grotesque aesthetic mode does so by apparently engaging with nothing but the quantitative multiplicity of matter. Bacon's Figures in his *Second Version of Triptych 1944*, for example, represent a paratactical arrangement of three vaguely human forms whose grotesqueness relies on a rearrangement (re-counting) of various parts of the

body. Yet, behind this corporeal re-counting, which takes place on the level of corporeal-quantitative multiplicity, an ontological process is implied and depicted. The forces which de-form Bacon's bodies ("The violence[s] of a hiccup, of a need to vomit, but also of a hysterical, involuntary smile") are, by constructing a plane of duration upon which past and present co-exist, also creating a relation between the body as it is 'supposed to have been' and the way it is now. In other words, because of the ontological forces that act upon them, the Figures of Bacon's *Triptych* always carry with them the virtual image of the 'normal' human body, of that which is implied to have been at some point in the past. Crumb's "Stoned Agin" explicitly presents this ontological process by juxtaposing a number of images that literally depict a metamorphosis of the human body from 'normal' to grotesque. In this way, again, "Stoned Agin" exists dually: as a filmic representation of a brief moment during which we witness a metamorphosis of the human form and as a plane upon which all the images/moments coexist. These two aspects represent this comic's direct engagement with qualitative and quantitative multiplicities: its filmic aspect represents its existence as a qualitative and hence relational multiplicity de-formed by body's ontological forces; conversely, its durational/plane aspect represents its existence as a quantitative and thus homogenous and spatio-coporeal multiplicity.

The governing principle of all these, nevertheless, is MULTIPLICITY-as-univocity, the principle arrived at via what is, admittedly, a dualism of the corporeal and the ontological, but a dualism that is "the enemy, an entirely necessary enemy, the furniture we are forever rearranging," through which we must pass and which we must undo in order to arrive "at the magic formula we all seek – PLURALISM = MONISM" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 20). This formula is firmly buttressed by the governing principle of MULTIPLICITY-as-univocity, which is the logic of the corporeo-ontological, with which MULTIPLICITY finally forms the triad

corporeal-ontological- MULTIPLICITY. This MULTIPLICITY is the immanent logic of the corporeo-ontological system, necessary and virtual but not actual. Its status as virtual is ultimately and paradoxically established by its invisibility, by its actual absence *and* virtual presence. In the art of Crumb and Bacon, this MULTIPLICITY is the logical and necessary yet invisible trace upon the de-formed imaged bodies and Figures (i.e. it is a process). While the materiality of the image is the proof of the corporeal and its de-formation is the proof of the ontological, MULTIPLICITY-as-univocity leaves no apparent physical trace on the grotesque body. It is however, the logic of these bodies, the "voice" with which these bodies are said and the lines with which they are drawn. As we shall see, the grotesque in literature operates in a similar way.

The grotesque, then, functions on a number of levels/planes. Firstly, it is an inherently ethical and political aesthetic mode whose progressive nature can be and often is negated at the level of expression by its co-optation into the dominant cultural mode such as late-stage capitalism, a cultural mode which functions via the logic of carnivalisation, of "constant self-revolutionizing, … reversals, crises, reinventions" (Žižek, *Organs* 212 – 213). Secondly, the grotesque aesthetic mode reveals an ontological plane upon which it functions and because of which it is, today, "the most genuine style" of art (Mann, "Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*" 240). In other words, because of its ontological nature and the type of ontology it reveals, the grotesque is the mode of art most in harmony with the present context of late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The ontology that the grotesque reveals is one of the corporeal, where it is 'stitched' via the logic of MULTIPLICITY to the level of socio-political (and economic) expression. It is out of a corporeal foundation that the grotesque aesthetic mode discloses first the duality of corporeal-ontological (or quantitative-qualitative multiplicities), and finally the triad corporeal-ontological-MULTIPLICITY. The final term of this triad is, as pointed out above,

immanent to (but separate from) the corporeo-ontological plane whose constitutive difference/ heteroglossia it "says" "univocally" and "neutrally" in a manner of "*extra-Being*, that is, the minimum of being common to the real, the possible, and the impossible" (*Logic of Sense* 180).

The bulk of the rest of this study will be dedicated to the exploration of the plane of expression upon which the ontological nature of the grotesque exerts influence and from which influence is exerted upon it. (Chapter 4 is the exception: it resumes the theoretical elaboration of the grotesque initiated here by considering its status as Real via Catherine Malabou's notion of plasticity and the texts of Samuel Delany.) In the next three chapters, the conceptualizations, uses, and representations of the body, the event, language, and the grotesque's relationship to architecture and life in the city will be explored, as well as (most importantly) the issue of grotesque's socio-political role within the context of late-stage capitalism. These topics will provide a basis upon which the grotesque's efficacy as a politically subversive aesthetic mode will be judged.

CHAPTER ONE

Sites of Brutalised Bodies in Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* and Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds*

Redistributing Bodies & Space

A spectre is haunting cultural production – the spectre of literature. "[W]ritten on the flesh of outlaw men and women," this spectre has recently become visible in the "[b]one-shattering, skin-splitting, blood-spurting [images of] Quentin Tarantino's cinema of viscera" (Dargis 117) in which bodies-intact are made grotesque through often-extreme acts of physical violence. These acts define Tarantino's grotesque approach to visual storytelling. Sarah Kane's drama – particularly the first three of the five full-length plays that make up her oeuvre[1] – similarly registers this spectre through images of physical and sexual violence. An exemplar of in-yer-face theatre, hers is "drama that takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message. It is a theatre of sensation … touching nerves and provoking alarm" (Sierz, *In-yer-face* 4). Through images of violence – of bodies made grotesque – Tarantino and Kane register the spectre of literature as redistribution of the perceptible, as violent plasticity and metamorphosis of the human form.

Jacques Rancière links this spectre-as-redistribution of the perceptible to literature's "democratic metapolitics," which emerges with its modern conceptualisation and codification in

[1] *Blasted* (1995), *Phaedra's Love* (1996), *Cleansed* (1998), *Crave* (1998), and *4.48 Psychosis* (2000). All these are collected in Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays*, introduced by David Greig and published by Methuen Drama, 2001.

Madame de Staël's *On Literature Considered in its Relationships with Social Institutions* (1800)[2]. Since then, and more particularly and palpably in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, this modern literary code has lent its "democratic literarity" (Rancière, *The Politics of Literature* 13), its "new way of linking the sayable and the visible, words and things" (9) to, among others, works of drama and film. Literature's practice of distributing and redistributing "space and time, place and identity, speech and noise, the visible and the invisible" – in short, literature's practice of "distribution [and redistribution] of the perceptible" (4) – has thus taken an important role in informing the ethical and political strategies of these media.

Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* (1998) and Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* (*IB*, 2009) – works of two auteurs whom critics have a number of times considered together under the category of "New Brutalism[3]" – participate in this trend, deploying literature's democratic metapolitics by drawing on a grotesque-ontological (re)distribution of matter and space so as to point to the de-forming human body as the evental site from which a politics of what Rancière terms *dissensus*, a new kind of community politics, can be effected. By presenting/constructing grotesque bodies and grotesque spaces, both Kane and Tarantino, as this chapter aims to show, utilise the grotesque as an aesthetic form in order to reveal art's ethical and political potentiality. They do this, in different media and via different narrative and visual strategies, by *overcoming the human body as an organism*, as strictly and solely a quantitative multiplicity (i.e. as *one*), via

[2] For a discussion of Madame de Staël's role in the elaboration of literature as a new mode of "linking the sayable and the visible," see Rancière's *The Politics of Literature*, 4ff.

[3] See, for example, Aleks Sierz's "Cool Britannia? 'In-Yer-Face' Writing in the British Theatre Today" (325 – 327), Graham Saunders's *'Love Me or Kill Me': Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes* (25 – 26), Paul Gormley's "Introduction" to his *The New-Brutality Film* (7 – 42), or Steve Waters's "Sarah Kane: From Terror to Trauma" (378).

the grotesque's triadic structure (corporeal-ontological-MULTIPLICITY); and they do so in order to present an ethics that goes beyond the ethics of "democratic materialism" (Badiou, *Logics of Worlds* 1) – which relies on a delineation of individual bodies (subjectivities) and languages (communities), and mutual, multicultural respect for the boundaries created[4] – in favour of an evental truth which is interested in "possibilities of [the present] situation" (Badiou, *Ethics* 16) from which stems change as distribution and redistribution of the perceptible.

The first three of Kane's plays generally follow a dramaturgic strategy established by her theatrical debut, *Blasted* (1995), a famously controversial play that garnered all manner of condemnation (and some praise) for, among its other shocking aspects, the (mis)treatment of the human body on stage. After its premiere, Aleks Sierz writes of *Blasted*'s reception by critics in his study of in-yer-face theatre,

> lurid adjectives kept piling up. The most popular ones were "disgusting," "disturbing," "degrading" and "depressing." Kane's "atrocity play" attracted labels such as "prurient psycho-fantasies," "unadulterated brutalism" and "degradation in the raw." Purple passages likened it to "having your face rammed into an overflowing ashtray" or said it left "a sour taste in the mind." … [One critic] couldn't recall "an uglier play"; … [and another] thought the Court [where the play was performed] should "close for the winter" rather than put it on. (*In-yer-face* 95)

All these vituperations – also easily detected in a number of reactions to Tarantino's debut, *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), as well as to many of his subsequent features – stem from the shock of

[4] This, of course, does not mean that this ethics of multiculturalism is fully negated and thus cancelled; rather, it forms an element of the new kind of ethics. I take up and more fully elaborate this idea in chapter 4.

witnessing images of brutal violence inflicted upon the human form[5]. "*Blasted*," writes Michael Billington derisively in his review of the play's premiere, "contains scenes of masturbation, fellatio, frottage, micturition, defecation – ah, those old familiar faeces! – homosexual rape, eye gouging and cannibalism. Far from crying, like the man in front of me: 'Bring back the censor,' I was simply left wondering how such naïve tosh managed to scrape past the Court's normally judicious play-selection committee" (qtd. in Sellar 33). This kind of reaction to Kane's debut – although in this particular case subsequently amended – was very much the norm in the British press: a "major technique used by Kane," writes Christopher Wixson, "is her graphic depiction of the violated body, and [in response] … critics had a field day" (82), deriding *Blasted* as – in the words of Jack Tinker – "a disgusting feast of filth" (qtd. in Wixson 83).

This, one of the most disparaging reviews of *Blasted* written by Tinker for the *Daily Mail*, describes the onstage environment created by Kane as "lawless," adding:

> [Kane] allows her three characters to behave with utmost bestiality to each other…. We begin with a journalist indulging in all manner of graphic sexual activity with an

[5] Todd McCarthy, reviewing the film for *Variety*, writes: "Undeniably impressive pic grabs the viewer by the lapels and shakes hard, but it also is about nothing other than a bunch of macho guys and how big their guns are. … [The] film is nihilistic but not resonantly so, giving it no meaning outside the immediate story and characters. Pic is impressive, but impossible to love." Paul Gormley categorises the film as a "new-brutality film," writing: "All these films attempt to assault the body of the viewer and make the body act involuntarily" (8). Amy Taubin similarly argues that "[w]hat's transgressive about *Reservoir Dogs* is … the way Tarantino lays bare the sado-masochistic dynamic between the film and the spectator … the torture scene, far from being gratuitous, as many critics have asserted, is a distillation of the slap/kiss manipulation of the film as a whole" (qtd. in Gormley 12). It is, hence, not surprising that at a Film Festival in Barcelona, "fifteen people walked out during the torture scene, including cult horror director Wes Craven and horror special effects artist Rick Baker" (Clarkson 180). In a negative review of *Pulp Fiction*, Tarantino's second directorial feature, Stanley Kauffmann writes, "*Pulp Fiction* revels in an underworld of menace and violence, of crime as cosmos, of sleaze," while Lisa Coulthard sees the violence in the two volumes of *Kill Bill* as reactionary, providing "imagistic and ideological support for the system they appear to subvert" (172).

> underage and mentally retarded girl in his hotel room somewhere in England. Then we regress, by various implausible stages, from mere unlawful indecency to vividly enacted male rape [and mutilation], through to the barbaric cannibalism of a dead baby and on to simple defecation on stage. (qtd. in Luckhurst 108 – 109)

The final tableau of the play is of a woman feeding and giving drink to a dead man's head which sticks out above the ground from an improvised grave as rain falls on them. The play's first truly hopeful moment, this tableau ends with the words "Thank you" uttered by the dead man (Kane, *Blasted* 61). The last scene of Kane's second play, *Phaedra's Love*, depicts Hippolytus dismembered, gutted, and disembowelled by a mob, smiling and uttering the words "If there could have been more moments like this" (103) an instant before a "vulture descends and begins to eat his body" (103). *Cleansed*, Kane's third play, is "bleaker even than *Blasted*," staging "repeated torture … [and b]odily mutilation … including the amputation of limbs, the severing of a tongue, anal abuse and the grafting of male genitalia" onto a woman's body (Luckhurst 113). One character is "slowly cut up, his lover … slaughtered before his eyes," another is "driven to suicide," and a third is "anatomically and emotionally transformed into her dead brother" (113). Like the previous two plays, however, *Cleansed* ends with an image of gradually more and more excruciating serenity, of a mutilated body smiling as the "sun comes out" and the play's world gets "brighter and brighter, the squeaking of the rats louder and louder, until the light is blinding and the sound is deafening" (Kane, *Cleansed* 151). In all these, we witness a body in the process of being made grotesque.

Tarantino's cinema is similarly leaden with violence and brutalisation of the human form. *Reservoir Dogs*' most infamous scene is "filmed in ten minutes of real time and centres on a gangster's apparently meaningless mutilation of a cop (who is through the positioning of the

camera aligned with the viewing audience) in a disused warehouse" (Gromley 7) set to the upbeat tune of *Stealers Wheel*'s 1972 hit "Stuck in the Middle with You":

MR BLONDE (off)

I'm not gonna bullshit you. I don't really care about what you know or don't know. I'm gonna torture you … regardless. Not to get information, but because torturing a cop amuses me. There's nothing you can say … [or] do. Except pray for a quick death, which you ain't gonna get.

He puts a piece of tape over the cop's mouth. …
Mr. Blonde walks away from the cop.

MR BLONDE

Let's see what's on K-Billy's "super sounds of the seventies" weekend.

He turns on the radio.
Stealer's Wheel's hit "Stuck in the Middle with You" plays out the speaker.
NOTE: This entire sequence is timed to the music.
Mr. Blonde slowly walks toward the cop. He opens a large knife. ...
Mr. Blonde just stares into the cop's/our face, holding the knife, singing along with the song.
Then, like a cobra, he lashes out.
A slash across the face.
The cop/camera moves around wildly.
Mr. Blonde just stares into the cop's/our face, singing along with the seventies hit.
Then he reaches out and cuts off the cop's/our ear.
The cop/camera moves around wildly.
Mr. Blonde holds the ear up to the cop/us to see. ...
Mr. Blonde pours the gasoline all over the cop, who's begging him not to do this.
Mr. Blonde just sings along with Stealer's Wheel.
Mr. Blonde lights up a match and, while mouthing:

MR. BLONDE

> "Clowns to the left of me, Jokers to the right. Here I am, stuck in the middle with you."

He moves the match up to the cop…

…When a bullet explodes in Mr. Blonde's chest[6]. (Tarantino, *Reservoir Dogs*)

Pulp Fiction, Tarantino's follow-up to *Reservoir Dogs*, stages scenes of realist violence set in a hyper-aestheticized world in which a man's head is blown off all over the inside of a Chevy Nova, another is anally raped, yet another is slashed open with a samurai sword, another is shot in the groin with a shotgun, and a woman who overdoses on heroin when she mistakes it for cocaine is brought back to life with a shot of adrenaline straight into the heart. *Kill Bill*, with its lopped-off body parts, torrents of blood, and scenes of enucleation moves even further than *Pulp Fiction* into the realm of hyper-aestheticized, "over-stylized," and "over-blown" violence and revenge which structure the film (Redmon). Like these movies, and Tarantino's other features[7],

---

[6] Paul Gromley describes the scene, as shot, in following words: "The camera cuts to a close-up of Blonde's boot as he lifts it on to a table to pull out a razor, asking the bizarre question, 'Ever listen to K. Billy's Super Sounds of the Seventies?' The film then zooms in on the cop's beaten and anguished face, before it cuts back to Blonde dancing around him. Suddenly, Blonde lunges at the cop and the viewer with the razor. The changes in point of view become more frenetic, as the gangster sits on the cop's knee, and begins to slice his ear off with the razor. The camera then pans away, leaving the actual disembodiment unseen – although the acousmatic sounds of the cop's muffled cries of pain leave us with the impression of being visually present throughout the mutilation. Blonde then moves back into the frame and while considering the organ, he alludes to the self-reflexive, sadistic and masochistic overtones of the scene with the question, 'Was that as good for you as it was for me?'" (7)

[7] The narrative in Tarantino's segment in *Four Rooms* (1995) is motivated by a lopped-off finger; *Jackie Brown* (1997) is more restrained in terms of its use of violence but in it gun violence is still prominent; *Death Proof* (2007) employs a "superimposition of campiness and brutality in … [its] last images" (Singer 11) and

IB revels in onscreen violence, most often enacted upon the heads and bodies of live or dead Nazi soldiers. In all these cases, however (even in *Kill Bill*, in which body-count is at times staggering), "[w]hat makes the violence hurt isn't some outrageous, literally deadening body count but the way Tarantino decelerates pain, squeezing it out drop by anguished drop" (Dargis, qtd. in Rehling 210). The brutalisation of the human body is, in almost every case – no matter if it is "uncomfortably protracted or else shockingly brief" (Rehling 210) – at the same time the centrepiece and the aberration of the films' cinematic logic: it "[stops] movie time and [plays] the violence out in real time" (Tarantino, qtd. in Rehling 210).

These scenes of violence visited upon the human body are precisely those "moment[s] in literature (as in art) that [are] manifested in image or event" that Barasch writes of when describing how the grotesque as an aesthetic mode functions ("The Grotesque as a Comic Genre" 4). These scenes are depictions of moments at which bodies intact are made grotesque; and in both Kane and Tarantino, these moments are frequent enough to give a more generalized grotesque logic to their works. And, as noted in the Introduction, these (grotesque) moments of deformation of the human form are events that occur on the Bergsonian plane of duration during which the corporeality of these bodies is stressed and which, while presenting the body deformed, also, importantly, evoke/present the body intact as both a concept and as audience's or my own embodiment. It is by functioning in such a way that the grotesque re/presentation is "connected to a sensation," ultimately "convey[ing] the violence of this sensation directly to the nervous

---

focuses closely on a moment of impact between two speeding cars, presenting "in graphic detail the specific fate of each passenger: in the montage one is launched through the windshield, another is crushed by a tire as the Chevy Nova caroms over the roof of their car, and Jungle Julia, whose leg had been dangling out the window is dismembered (Singer 10). Tarantino's most recent film, *Django Unchained* (2012), a purported second movie in a trilogy started with *Inglourious Basterds*, enacts scenes of violent revenge in the era of slavery in the southern USA.

system" of its audience (Smith xiii). As we will see below, it is also through this process that the grotesque activates the political and ethical potentiality of art in *IB* and *Cleansed*.

Admittedly, there are a number of differences between stylistic, formal, and narrative choices made by Kane and Tarantino; in fact, Kane was often careful to differentiate herself explicitly from the aestheticized Hollywood violence deployed by movies such as *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction*. So, even though Aleks Sierz stresses in-yer-face theatre's Tarantino connection, noting that "[j]ust as Hollywood was rediscovering the pulling power of such controversial films as *Pulp Fiction* … British theatre was taking up violence as a way of exploring social issues" ("Cool Britannia" 325), speaking of "post-Tarantinians" in British theatre (David Edgar, qtd. in "Cool Britannia" 326) and the ways in which much of their work "appeals to targeted audience who share the writers' and directors' relish for Tarantino and drug culture" (Peter Ansorge, qtd. in "Cool Britannia" 327), he is also careful to point out the ways in which Kane, as the epitome of in-yer-face theatre, and Tarantino diverge by noting that "*Blasted* is about 'hope and love'; Tarantino films are not" (*In-yer-face* 105). As I already remarked, Kane was herself often careful to differentiate her work from the Hollywood-aestheticized violence of Tarantino's films by identifying works such as *Blasted* as belonging to a principally "theatrical tradition" (Kane, qtd. in Saunders 26) in opposition to a tradition of cinema within which Tarantino's films operate: "[H]e doesn't write about violence and he certainly doesn't write or make films about love," Kane notes of Tarantino critically; "His films are about film convention and they're completely self-referential, they refer to other historical films – that's all they do" (qtd. in Saunders 25). Kane also, as Saunders points out, "expressed her displeasure at the way Tarantino's influence found its way into … a 1996 production of *Blasted* in Hamburg, Germany" (26) by noting:

> This man walked on-stage … in a really trendy leather jacket, greased back hair, sun-glasses wrapped around – this 30 year old. And I thought, 'Oh, my God that's supposed to be Ian' – that's supposed to be a 45-year-old dying man. And I thought, 'where have I seen this character?' And it's Tarantino, and my heart just broke – I could hear this cracking in my chest! And in some ways that becomes quite insulting – the work is seen as part of a school which I abhor. (Kane, qtd. in Saunders 26)[8]

Edward Bond, a notorious British playwright of an earlier generation and one of the first defenders of Kane's theatre, thus comments with some pathos: "There's a huge difference between Tarantino and *Blasted*. Both deal with chaos. One says chaos is dangerous for us but we have to go into chaos and find ourselves. The other says chaos is a gimmick, a new device – it's a trick. Tarantino will make his fortune. Sarah Kane kills herself" (qtd. in Saunders 25).

Yet despite these and other perceived differences, violence enacted on the human body and this body's opening and deformation are the aesthetic and narrative foci of both Kane's plays and Tarantino's films. Moreover, far from being simply gratuitous, the brutalisation of the human body through which it is made grotesque depicted in Kane's drama and Tarantino's cinema is enacted as a part of a conscious strategy employing grotesque aesthetics in order to activate theatre's and cinema's ethical and political forms, forms cinema and theatre have, as I noted above, inherited from the novel as a democratic medium. As Bond notes, both Kane and Tarantino deal with chaos; and despite Kane's reading of Tarantino's films as nothing but self-

[8] Kane continues, "My plays certainly exist within a theatrical tradition, though not many people would agree with that. I'm at the extreme end of the theatrical tradition [of, most notably, Bertolt Brecht, Edward Bond, Georg Büchner, and Samuel Beckett]. But they are not about other plays; they are not about methods of representation. On the whole, they are about love and about survival and about hope, and to me that is an extremely different thing. So when I go to see a production of *Blasted*, in which all of the characters are complete shits and I don't care about them I get upset" (qtd. in Saunders 26).

referential – as referring to nothing external to themselves but other films – both *Cleansed* and *IB* deal with chaos by carefully organising this chaos into a two-dimensional plane of matter acting upon itself, a plane out of which the political potentials of theatre and cinema are propelled via the imaged violence of body upon body, of matter upon itself.

My Body, Your Body

Before I consider how Kane and Tarantino establish this two-dimensional plane of matter acting upon itself, a plane founded upon the principles of grotesque ontology described in the Introduction, allow me to start with the example of *IB*. This discussion, after which I will turn to Kane's *Cleansed*, will serve as the first step of a somewhat circuitous attempt to describe how the political and ethical potentials of these texts are activated through their uses of the grotesque, an aesthetic mode premised directly upon various enactments of de-formation and rending of the human body. This discussion will also allow us to consider the way these texts, especially *IB*, reveal certain principles of what Walter Benjamin refers to as historical materialism and its ethico-political import. As we will see, *IB* in particular shows how the grotesque can be used to form links – what Benjamin terms "constellations" – between the present moment and historical events in the service of revealing the present moment's inherent tensions and struggles as well as the way in which the present order masks these tensions by casting itself as the logical end-product of a linear, causal historical process.

The world in which the characters of *IB* function is a mash-up of two opposed worlds: one that is deeply cinematic-historical and the other that is deeply world-historical. Thus, the film speaks two languages: one cinematic and the other historical. This mash-up of two worlds is signalled as early as the opening credits of the film which feature Nick Perito's version of

Dimitri Tiomkin's "The Green Leaves of Summer," a song originally composed for and used in the opening credits of John Wayne's epic western, *The Alamo*[9]. From the very beginning, then, Tarantino's film aligns itself with a "great historical epic" such as *The Alamo* (Farnsworth 24), the historical material for which John Wayne himself characterised as "the greatest piece of folklore ever brought down through history" (qtd. in Farnsworth 25). Ending with white titles on a black screen, announcing "Chapter One: Once upon a time… in Nazi-occupied France," the opening title sequence of *IB* references both the mythological world of the western, most commonly nurtured through novels, comics, and cinema, as well as the founding historical event of the contemporary era: World War Two[10]. This gesture is even more obvious in the original screenplay for the film, which announces chapter one as "Once upon a time in… Nazi-occupied

---

[9] In an interview released on *The Tarantino Connection* (1996) – an album featuring soundtrack highlights from his movies – Tarantino comments: "One of the things I do when I'm starting a movie, is – no, forget starting a movie, when I'm thinking about writing a film; when I have … an idea for a film – is, what I'll do is I'll go through my record collection and just start playing songs; trying to … in some ways, find the personality of the movie; find the spirit of the movie. And then – boom! – eventually … I'll hit like one, two, three songs … [and] one song in particular – "Oh, this'll be a great opening credit song" – you know; 'cause to me the opening credits are very, very important because that's … the only … mood time that most movies give themselves, you know. A cool credit sequence and the music that plays in front of it, or you know, don't play any music in front of it – whatever you decide to do – that sets up like a tone for the movie that is important for you. So I'm always trying to find what the right opening credit or closing credit sequence should be early on even when I'm just … thinking about the story; because once I find it that really kind of triggers me in to what the personality of this piece should be, what the rhythm of this piece should be. Like I'm saying, you don't have to use music, it could just be silence, alright; but then that's important; that is … in some ways … the rhythm, … [or] the personality you're trying to project in this film."

[10] Theodor Adorno's "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" ("Cultural Criticism and Society" 210) is often seen as an example of a founding literary gesture of the contemporary period that locates the *gestalt* of the contemporary period in the attempts to deal with the atrocities of the Second World War, and particularly the concentration camps such as Auschwitz.

France," referencing more obviously Sergio Leone's *Time* Trilogy[11] – particularly its first and most famous instalment, *Once Upon a Time in the West* – as well as its contemporary homages such as Robert Rodriguez's *Once Upon a Time in Mexico*[12] and, at the same time, the Second World War as a historical event. The two parts of the introductory title – "Once upon a time… in Nazi occupied France" – separated by simple ellipses, hence, together with the soundtrack firmly establish the dual situatedness of the film.

Figure 1: The opening shot of *Inglourious Basterds*

Tarantino has commented on the opening scene of *IB*, referencing the wide shots and the cinematography used in it as essential in establishing the universe within which the action will take place (Figure 1):

> [O]ne of the things I always enjoyed about spaghetti westerns was the brutal landscape, the brutal world in which they took place. It was much more unforgiving and hostile than most American western landscapes. It's very violent, life is cheap, death is around the

[11] *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1969); *Duck, You Sucker!* (1971, also known as *A Fistful of Dynamite* or *Once Upon a Time… the Revolution*); and *Once Upon a Time in America* (1984).

[12] According to Robert Rodriguez's MySpace page (www.myspace.com/rodriguez_troublemaker), Tarantino suggested the title for this film and was supposed to star in it.

> corner at any moment. Well, that describes Europe during World War II – right there in the 20th century, a very close approximation of a spaghetti-western landscape. And something I find … interesting about the opening chapter of [*IB*] is that, even with the Nazi uniforms, even with the motorcycles and the car, it doesn't break the western feel. It almost adds to it in a strange, shouldn't-work-but-does kind of way. It just feels like a western. And not even just a spaghetti western: it could be *Shane*. (Gilbey)

With the soundtrack provided by Ennio Morricone's "La Condanna," originally written for Sergio Sollima's spaghetti western *The Big Gundown* (1966), the opening scene in which we meet the film's villain – Colonel Hans Landa of the S.S. (Christoph Waltz), also known as the Jew Hunter – resumes the work initiated by the opening credits: that of establishing a world in which cinema-history and world-history, myth and fact, fiction and nonfiction interweave.

This opening sequence also reflects Walter Benjamin's differentiation between historicist and historical materialist uses of history in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History." Here, Benjamin argues that historicism embodies a hegemonic understanding of history whereby "a causal connection" leading to the present moment is established "between various moments in history" (263). Historicism thus rationalises the present hegemonic order as the necessary outcome of historical events. Historical materialism, on the other hand, starts with the present, seeking in the past resonances with which to form a constellation in the service of a political struggle. The present is thus frozen "in a configuration pregnant with tensions" that Benjamin describes as monadic (263) but that we can more accurately describe as nomadic, as built on the principles of disjunctive synthesis. This moment is "a Messianic cessation of happening" and "a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past" (263). "Once upon a time" is in this context, for Benjamin, a signifier of historicists' exploitation of history in the service of a

particular, hegemonic socio-political order, a "whore … in historicism's bordello" (262), because it marks the past as linear, causative, and leading to the present order. In the opening scene of *IB*, this signifier's function is amended by the particularization achieved by the phrase "in Nazi-occupied France." The result of this amendment is that – especially in light of Tarantino's literal rewriting of history with the killing of Adolf Hitler near the end of the film – the historical event depicted in *IB* is "blast[ed] … out of the homogenous course of history" (Benjamin 263) in the service of the explorations of the tensions of the present moment. This treatment of history establishes "a conception of the present as the 'time of the now' that is shot through with chips of Messianic time" (263). In other words, the tension of the present moment is galvanized by a search for other historical 'nows' with which the present can form a constellation. As we will see below, co-opting the events of World War Two in the service of the ethical and political exploration of the now is both the root of *IB*'s ethical project and the main reason this film has evoked negative reactions from a number of critics.

The second chapter – entitled "INGLOURIOUS BASTERDS" – continues "doing a spaghetti western with World War II iconography" (Gilbey) as we meet the Basterds, a team of nine Jewish American soldiers, led by Lieutenant Aldo Raine (Brad Pitt), "the direct descendant of mountain man Jim Bridger" which means that he has "a little Injun in [him]" (*IB*). As the Basterds start to operate within Nazi territory and we encounter a flamboyant, hysterical, and feminized Hitler wearing a cape, the brutalization of Nazi-bodies begins, often accompanied by music of Ennio Morricone[13]. Aside from once again marking the grotesque as the provenance of hardboiled masculinity, the conflict between what are historically understood as the forces of absolute good and those of absolute evil is, consequently – via the motive of scalping, camera

[13] For example, the soundtrack to the scene in which we, for the first time, see the Basterds scalping Nazis is provided by Morricone's "Il Mercenario (Reprisa)" from Sergio Corbucci's 1968 western, *The Mercenary.*

angles and cinematography (Figure 2), and via the film's musical score – aligned with the ethos of the revisionary western, particularly with that of Sergio Leone's spaghetti western, which is the most important aesthetic source for Tarantino's film. Even though the World War Two/ spaghetti western mash-up aesthetic is, as Tarantino himself notes, left behind at the end of the second chapter (qtd. in Gilbey), it nonetheless continues to inform the viewers' understanding of the rest of the film and, most importantly, it continues to shape the dynamic between the film's 'heroes' and its 'villains.'

Figure 2: The American West in the midst of Europe

The fact that the ethos of Leone's westerns informs our understanding of the conflict between the Nazis and the Basterds is the first hint of the complication of the apparent strict dichotomy established between the forces of good (Lieutenant Aldo and the Basterds) and the forces of evil (Colonel Landa and the Nazis), the dichotomy built upon the almost global consensus on the understanding of the conflict that was World War Two. As Lee Clark Mitchell writes:

> Parodically, Leone resurrected certain standard personalities, self-consciously breathing life into characters long since become caricatures. By focusing on glaring eyes, mean faces, and lean bodies, all in a flamboyant style that diverts attention from the motion of

> plot itself, he humorously succeeds in undercutting the idea of any moral code – if only by treating such codes as little more than physical reflex. Leone's characters seem mere empty shells, and issues of right and wrong, appropriate behavior, and honorable acts are either discarded or self-mockingly reduced to questions of skill, puncturing the 1950s ideal of the high-minded man with a gun. (225)

This description of Leone's technique can be directly applied to Tarantino's *IB*. Like Leone's, Tarantino's characters are stock characters taken from film history that for Tarantino includes Leone himself. Like Leone's, Tarantino's style is flamboyant: a short interpolated segment introducing a German officer-turned-Basterd Hugo Stiglitz (Til Schweiger), for example, is vintage 'cool Tarantino' complete with a voiceover narration by Samuel L. Jackson, graphic titles, and the soundtrack provided by Billy Preston's 1972 hit "Slaughter."

Most importantly, as in Leone's films, Tarantino's characters – Basterds and Nazis alike – are driven not by a carefully developed moral code but by a kind of extreme parody of one. This fact immediately problematizes the masculinities depicted: even though the implicit valorization of these figures is undeniable (in parallel with the valorization of the Basterds), we are far from the representations of traditional masculinities and heroes celebrated in classic westerns. And as the strictly drawn border between heroes and villains is further smudged throughout the film, this problematization of masculinity becomes more and more evident. Colonel Landa, ostensibly the film's villain, for example, explains early in the film, just before slaughtering a Jewish family hidden under the floorboards of a cottage, that he works for an "enterprise" which is now "under new management." He "love[s]" his moniker – the Jew Hunter – because he feels he has "earned it." After comparing Jews to rats, he explains that he doesn't

"consider the comparison an insult." "Consider for a moment the world a rat lives in," Landa relates,

> It's a hostile world indeed. … Rats were the cause of the bubonic plague, but that was some time ago. I propose to you, any disease a rat could spread a squirrel could equally carry. … Yet I assume you don't share the same animosity with squirrels that you do with rats, do you? … You [simply] don't like them [rats]. You don't really know why you don't like them. All you know is, you find them repulsive. (*IB*)

Sympathising with the plight of the Jew and comparing the German to the hawk, Landa's logic is perverse yet his reasoning is strangely persuasive, making us, the audience, complicit in the Jewish family's murder and "weaken[ing] the same rationality we would use against him" (Natoli). "[A]s ingratiating a Devil as Walter Huston's Nick Bael was in *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, … more appealing, more human than Conrad Veidt as Colonel Strasser in *Casablanca*, … less odious than Ralph Fiennes as the Nazi Commandant in *Schindler's List*" (Natoli), Colonel Landa is clearly a representation of moral vacuousness, but as a character he is charming and persuasive, aglow in the aura of Tarantino cool[14].

Correspondingly, Lieutenant Aldo Raine, the film's 'hero,' is a stock tough-guy character with a scar (or, as the screenplay states, "a rope-burn" – "as if, once upon a time, he survived a lynching") that stretches from his left ear to his right. Like many of Tarantino's creations, he

[14] The ambiguity of Landa as villain is further confirmed by Christoph Waltz's role in Tarantino's follow-up to *IB*, *Django Unchained*, in which Waltz plays Dr. Kind Schultz, a German bounty hunter who is a character – ethically and in the manner in which Waltz approached playing him - practically identical to Landa. He is, however, made 'good' by the different historical context (Tarantino described this story of an escaped slave played by Jamie Foxx and set in the US south in the late 1850s as a "companion piece" to *IB*; see http://www.totalfilm.com/news/quentin-tarantino-hints-at-inglourious-basterds-django-unchained-trilogy).

"ain't so much a good guy as he's just a bad motherfucker" (*True Romance*)[15] and his moral stance, although naturally more sympathetic to the audience, is even simpler than Landa's:

> Now I don't know 'bout y'all, but I sure as hell didn't come down from the goddamn Smoky Mountains, cross five thousand miles of water, fight my way through half Sicily, and jump out of a fuckin' air-o-plane to teach the Nazis lessons in humanity. Nazi ain't got no humanity. They're the foot soldiers of a Jew-hatin', mass-murderin' maniac, and they need to be destroyed. That's why any and every son-of-a-bitch we find wearin' a Nazi uniform, they're gonna die. … We will be cruel to the Germans, and through our cruelty, they will know who we are. They will find the evidence of our cruelty in the disemboweled, dismembered, and disfigured bodies of their brothers we leave behind us.

The large part of the visceral pleasure gained from watching Tarantino's film stems from the simple fact that being cruel to the Nazis seemingly does not require justification. The scene near the end of the film in which Adolf Hitler is brutally and bloodily massacred by machine guns at close range is, according to this logic, simple revenge pleasure gained from what is presented as a morally unproblematic act, an act committed by the film's heroes – heroes that Joseph Natoli calls "Barbarians of Goodness."

However, whether being cruel to the Germans requires a justification is a completely separate question. The scene of Hitler's massacre and the rest of the good vs. evil dichotomy upon which the film is based are complicated by the fact that minutes prior to the killing of Hitler, we – the audience – witness a metacinematic moment during which a German audience is watching and cheering a Nazi war propaganda film, directed by Joseph Goebbels himself, in which a German hero is relentlessly shooting down Allied soldiers from a tower. The visceral

[15] *True Romance* is Tarantino's first screenplay for a major motion picture, which he sold in order to finance *Reservoir Dogs*; Tony Scott directed the film.

pleasure we gain from seeing dead Nazis on the screen – and the movie auditorium in which I watched the movie erupted in cheers as Hitler was massacred in an uncanny replication of scenes we had just been watching – is therefore complicated by the morally unproblematic act the German audience is celebrating onscreen. "Whether we are all Nazis now," writes Joseph Natoli, "or whether we are Barbarians of Goodness who escape moral condemnation is a dilemma that presents the ultimate opening to a moral review that … Tarantino's film makes[16]." Of course,

[16] Natoli justifies this argument by writing, "When Colonel Landa … unexpectedly appears at the premier of Joseph Goebbels' film, he … confronts American Jewish Nazi hunters pretending to be Italian filmmakers. But Landa speaks a fluent Italian while "Aldo the Apache" and his cohorts pronounce their own names differently each time Colonel Landa asks them to repeat what they've said. So we have witnessed Colonel Landa speaking fluent English, French and Italian as well as his own German. What do we note regarding the American Jewish Nazi hunters? The "Bear Jew" (Eli Roth) comes out of a cave and smashes with a baseball bat the head of a German soldier who dies, quite clearly, quite bravely regardless of how evil he may be as a German soldier. "Aldo the Apache" cuts a swastika on Colonel Landa's head at the end of the film and declares it his masterpiece. … [T]he American Jewish Nazi hunters are Barbarians of the Good, by which I mean that everything is morally permitted – stupidity, ignorance, savagery ("Aldo the Apache" sticks his finger in the German actress's bullet hole to get the truth out of her) – because goodness can never commit an evil in its battle with evil. You can take this attitude right up to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's and Vice President Dick Cheney's advocacy of torture at Guantanamo: we're the good guys; we can't do anything wrong. If we have reasoned our way to this view, then perhaps we've reasoned as Colonel Landa and the SS officer reason. If we come to this view on purely moral grounds then we fail to apply the same moral evaluative criteria to ourselves which means our moral base is no more than our own self-interest and the preservation of our own order of things with the help of the needed moral justification, the needed moral front, the needed moral alibi. … Consider further how Colonel Landa's last second choice to spare the fleeing girl, Shoshanna Dreyfus (Mélanie Laurent), and his pleasure in asserting his own freedom to choose, mimics what we all take to be the sign of our humanity: our freedom to choose. By not choosing to show what happens to the farmer and his family, we are left with a Colonel Landa whose evil has not the certainty that, say, for instance, George W. Bush conferred immediately upon Osama bin Laden. … [O]ur entrepreneurial drive to innovate … and drive the old into obsolescence, to compete vigorously and creatively destroy our competition, to overthrow the opposition presented by tradition, religious and ethnic identity, and imagined community, and allow market values to rule in their place, to connect a rational choice to self-interest in every domain – all this smacks of Satanic energy and purpose, of, in fact, a Nazi-like credo to dominate."

there is a distinct possibility that these two options are intimately linked: that the choice of either/or is not really a choice at all; that the negative disjunctive *either/or* in fact masks an affirmative synthetic disjunction based on the conjunction *and*. It is, ultimately, this that Tarantino's movie suggests. Both the Nazis and the Barbarians of Goodness, in other words, are of our world and we are they. By the film's final scene, Lieutenant Aldo's neck-scar has been duplicated by Aldo himself on Colonel Landa's forehead, where Aldo cuts in a large swastika with a hunting knife. In this scene, the film further stresses how isomorphic Aldo and Landa are through Aldo's homily to Landa, substantial parts of which Aldo already delivered earlier in the film to a German soldier seconds before he let him go with no other injury but a swastika carved into his forehead with a large hunting knife:

LT. ALDO

You know, Utivich and myself heard that deal you made with the brass. End the war tonight? I'd make that deal. How 'bout you, Utivich, you make that deal?

UTIVICH

I'd make that deal.

LT. ALDO

I don't blame ya. Damn good deal. And that pretty little nest ya feathered for yourself. Well, if you're willing to barbecue the whole high command, I suppose that's worth certain considerations. But I do have one question. When you go to your little place on Nantucket island, I imagine you gonna take off that handsome-looking S.S. uniform of yours, ain't ya?

For the first time in the movie, Col. Landa doesn't respond.

LT. ALDO

That's what I thought. Now, that I can't abide. How 'bout you, Utivich, can you abide it?

UTIVICH

Not one damn bit, sir.

LT. ALDO

I mean if I had my way, you'd wear that goddamn uniform for the rest of your pecker-suckin' life. But I'm aware that ain't practical. I mean at some point ya gotta hafta take it off.

He opens Landa's S.S. dagger and holds the blade in front of Hans's face.

LT. ALDO

So I'm gonna give you a little somethin' you can't take off.

As in most other Quentin Tarantino movies – *Reservoir Dogs*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Kill Bill* – characters are primarily identified by their clothes, their uniforms: "[B]oth cops and gangsters," writes Mark T. Conrad generally of Tarantino's films, "have uniforms that distinguish them from real people" (103). "In *Pulp Fiction*, the transformation from gangster to real person (or at least the desire therefor) is … symbolized by the shedding of the uniform and the donning of everyday clothes," while in *Kill Bill*

> the Bride first attempts to shed her various cool assassin uniforms to put on a wedding dress. She is prevented from leaving the life [of an assassin] and becoming a real person when the remaining DiVAS [Deadly Viper Assassination Squad] at the behest of Bill (David Carradine), nearly kill her. By the end of the film [after she has gone through a number of often recognisable uniforms, most importantly that of Bruce Lee's famous yellow-and-black jumpsuit from *Game of Death*], after she's found her redemption through violence and revenge, she succeeds in becoming a real person, wearing a skirt, and taking on the role of mother. (Conrad 104)

Similarly, the most important feature that separates the American Lieutenant Aldo Raine and the German Colonel Hans Landa is the uniform. The thought Raine can't abide – even though he understands and can abide the deal Landa has made with the Allied High Command – is that when he takes off his uniform, Landa will be just like him when he takes off his uniform: absolutely nothing will set him apart from 'real' people. So, Raine must mark Landa; he must carve into his body that which will set him apart from real people: Raine, in other words, gives Landa a uniform he cannot take off.

Yet it is paradoxically this moment that marks Landa as isomorphic to Raine both in terms of the cruelty of their actions and in terms of the scars they have. It is this moment, the deformation of Landa's body by Raine's, that finally and firmly establishes the world of *IB* as a two-dimensional world made up of a mash-up of cinematic genre conventions and historical veracity, populated by two-dimensional characters, in which the primary function of matter (character) is simply to act upon matter (character). This world, then, is a world built upon a foundation of grotesque ontology, an ontology hidden by the apparent dichotomy established between the Basterds and the Nazis. This ontology, described in the Introduction, is based on an overcoming of the organism – the individual human body with its associated internal and psychological individuality – as solely a quantitative multiplicity via the grotesque's triadic (corporeal-ontological- MULTIPLICITY) structure, in the interest of emphasizing the possible reconfigurations of the material and social realms – what Rancière calls "redistribution of the perceptible." As we will see below, both Tarantino and Kane are expressly concerned with these types of redistributions that tinker with, remove, and ignore the signposts of individuality of personalities and bodies. At least some of the above-described negative reactions to Kane's and

Tarantino's works, I would here like to suggest, are caused not just by visceral reactions to scenes of explicit violence, but also by the social and ethical instability these scenes imply.

So, for example, the fact that Tarantino uses what are often considered sacred sacrifices committed by the Allied troops during the Second World War to construct this grotesque world goes a long way toward explaining the negative reactions to the film: "Jonathan Rosenbaum called the film 'deeply offensive as well as profoundly stupid … morally akin to Holocaust denial.' … [I]n his one-star *Guardian* review, Peter Bradshaw wrote it off as 'a colossal, complacent, long-winded dud, a gigantic two-and-a-half-hour anti-climax' … [and] Manohla Dargis of *The New York Times* thought it 'unwieldy,' 'interminable,' 'repellent,' and 'vulgar,'" (Walters 19). The grotesque ontology operating in Tarantino's film visually undermines the strict ethical distinction between the Absolute Good and Absolute Evil (even though, on the level of the filmic narrative, this distinction continues to operate) in order to postulate a world of matter acting upon itself. The final scene of *IB* in which Raine carves a swastika upon Landa's forehead is, in this context, a depiction of bodies acting upon bodies: a depiction of what was in the Introduction described as matter acting upon itself. Even though the film never falls into the trap of moral relativism (by directly equating the evils of the Basterds with the evils of the Nazis), it does present two evils, one of which is – due to the immanent historical and filmic contexts[17] – momentarily more acceptable than the other. As I already noted, the film presents these two evils on the level of visual narrative: both through the acts of violence (Basterds' mission is to replicate the Nazis' atrocities upon Nazi bodies) such as Raine's carving of Landa's bodies, and by duplicating the marks of violence found on bodies of both Basterds and Nazis – marks such as Raine's neck-scar and Landa's forehead-scar.

[17] The historical context is, of course, the Second World War, while the filmic context is the genre's use and elaboration of heroes and villains.

Similarly, Kane's *Cleansed* establishes – theatrically rather than cinematically – a world built on the foundations of grotesque ontology. Presenting a "world of vivid stage pictures that push what theatre can show to its limits" (Urban, "An Ethics" 42), *Cleansed* is a radically visual play – "[a] quick glance at the text reveals that there is almost as many stage directions as [lines of] dialogue," comments Ken Urban (42) – whose world is strictly that of matter exerting force, through explicit and gruesome violence, upon matter. The opening scene of Kane's play is set "[j]ust inside the perimeter fence of a university" (Kane, *Cleansed* 107) that also doubles as a sort of torture or concentration camp. In this setting, extreme torture and "an externalisation of a love that refuses to give in to punishment" (Aston 91) are pitted against one another, and their effects are literally and painfully enacted on the human body. Yet despite their conflict, these two forces – physical torture and love – are explored as operating under the same principles; "these two strands of the personal and political" are "[brought] together … in a very distinct way" (Saunders 93). As Kane herself commented:

> There's a point in *A Lover's Discourse* when [Roland Barthes] says the situation of a rejected lover is not unlike the situation of a prisoner in Dachau. And when I read it I was just appalled and thought how can he possibly suggest the pain of love is as bad as that. But then the more I thought about it I thought actually I do know what he is saying. It's about the loss of self. And when you lose yourself where do you go? There's nowhere to go, it's actually a kind of madness. And thinking about that I made the connection with *Cleansed*. If you put people in a situation in which they lose themselves and what you're writing about is an emotion in which people lose themselves, then you can make that connection between the two. (qtd. in Saunders 93)

In the stage-action of *Cleansed*, this interweaving of love and physical suffering is best illustrated by the relationship between one of the four pairs of lovers, Rod and Carl, as Carl's attempts at expressions of deep love for Rod are most directly, ruthlessly, and systematically undermined by Tinker, a kind of role-shifting Josef Mengele figure of Kane's stage-world.

Scene Eight, one of "a series of vividly lit, cunningly designed tableaux" (Clapp, qtd. in Saunders 86) around which the play was constructed during its original run at the Royal Court Theatre Downstairs, is a typical example of how Kane's play functions. Here is the scene in its entirety:

> *A patch of mud just inside the perimeter fence of the university.*
>
> *It is raining.*
> *The sound of a football match in progress on the other side of the fence.*
> *A single rat scuttles around between* **Rod** *and* **Carl**.
>
> **Rod** Baby.
>
> **Carl** (*Looks at* **Rod**. *He opens his mouth. No sound comes out* [Rod has had his tongue cut out earlier in the play by Tinker].)
>
> **Rod** You'd have watched them crucify me.
>
> **Carl** (*Tries to speak. Nothing.*
> *He beats the ground in frustration*.)
>
> **Carl** *scrabbles around in the mud and begins to write while* **Rod** *talks.*
>
> **Rod** And the rats eat my face. So what. I'd have done the same only I never said I wouldn't. You're young. I don't blame you. Don't blame yourself. No one's to blame.
>
> **Tinker** *is watching.*
> *He lets* **Carl** *finish what he is writing, then goes to him and reads it.*
> *He takes* **Carl** *by the arms and cuts off his hands*.
> **Tinker** *leaves.*
> **Carl** *tries to pick up his hands – he can't, he has no hands.*
> **Rod** *goes to* **Carl**.
> *He picks up the severed left hand and takes off the ring he put there.*
> *He reads the message written in the mud.*
>
> **Rod** Say you forgive me.
> (*He puts on the ring*.)
> I won't lie to you, Carl.
>
> *The rat begins to eat* **Carl***'s right hand*. (129 – 130)

All the major characteristics of Kane's representational strategy are present here. The paucity of dialogue is offset by stage action described in simple yet powerful language that, in the staging, brings forth powerfully disturbing imagery[18]. The outside world – represented by the "sound of a football match in progress" – is strictly separated from the action by its visual absence and by the fence that relegates it to beyond the boundaries of the stage[19]. This creates a feeling of isolation and containment of the world (the camp/us) within which the action takes place. In other words, throughout most of the play, the university campus of *Cleansed* is a representation

---

[18] Gaëlle Ranc, in her dissertation entitled "The Notion of Cruelty in the Work of Sarah Kane," writes: "David Greig says, 'With Cleansed, Kane wrote a play which demanded that its staging be as poetic as its writing.' 'I knew some of the stage directions were impossible' she says, 'but I also genuinely believe you can do anything on-stage. There's absolutely nothing you can't represent one way or another.' And the several productions of *Cleansed* proved she was right. 'Designed by Jeremy Herbert, the staging featured […] rats represented by twitching bags with tails, blood by ribbons, fire by an orange-lit cloth. Directed by James Macdonald, some scenes were shown as if from above, in others the stage tilted; mutilation was deliberately unrealistic.' And he concludes by saying that it '[gives] a glimpse of what theatre might be like in the future, the product of an ongoing conversation with live art.'

"But if *Cleansed* is … a challenge for directors, it is also a challenge for actors. It is so violent that, for the first rehearsal, the actors had to do psychological work on themselves[;] however Kane says they knew it was not gratuitous violence and that what they had gone through was justified:

> We made the decision that I would try to do the violence as realistically as possible. If it didn't work then we'd try something else. But that was the starting point to see how it went. And the very first time when we did the final scene with all the blood and the false bowels by the end of it we were all severely traumatised. All the actors were standing there covered in blood having just raped and slit their throats, and then one of them said, this is the most disgusting play I've ever been in, and he walked out. But because of the work we'd done before all of us knew that that point was reached because of a series of emotional journeys that had been made. So none of us felt it was unjustified, it was just completely unpleasant.

The journalist Simon Hattenstone says, 'Artaud once said this nice thing, that his plays require acting without a safety net, and Sarah's plays require that too. Emotionally.'"

[19] Kane borrows here from Jean Genet who employs the same tactic in his 1957 play, *The Balcony*.

of a thermodynamic closed system, a "system that cannot gain or lose matter, heat, or work" ("Closed System") but within which energy is exchanged and acts upon matter via matter. Furthermore, as throughout the play, Kane's characters are here delineated in minimalist terms and – as in *IB* – act as at the same time less and more than realist "outward manifestations of psychology and social interaction" (Saunders 88). They and the world they function in, rather, exist as pure "expression[s] of emotion" (88) and as recognisable theatrical tropes that engage with and draw on the history of theatre. So, for example, the "episodic structure of the play, which … 'does not so much unfold as accumulate,' … is based on Büchner's play *Woyzeck*" (Saunders 87) which Kane directed for Gate Theatre in 1997. *Cleansed* is also, comments Saunders, "the most *neo-Jacobean* of Kane's plays, whereby every word, action and gesture are uncompromising and *in extremis*" (90). Its anti-naturalist setting and characters are, moreover, borrowed from the expressionist theatre such as August Strindberg's *The Ghost Sonata* (1908) and from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (Saunders 94 – 95), as well as more generally from Samuel Beckett's theatre (see, for example, Saunders *passim*, Barry, and Sierz, "Sarah Kane")[20].

Parallel to Tarantino's film, then, Kane's play is built upon a theatrical tradition that shuns (psychological) realism and naturalism in favour of a deeply theatrical experience. The stage-action follows "the surreal logic of a traumatic dream" (Wallace 221), and this is reflected in *Cleansed*'s original staging:

---

[20] In her "Beckett, Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Catastrophe," Elizabeth Barry writes of Beckett's influence on Kane, noting, for example, that "[b]oth playwrights renounce the attempt to make language appropriate or adequate to such misery [that their plays stage], the attempt to react solemnly to the situation. Both flaunt instead a kind of *litotes*, a laconic, even bleakly comic understatement" (183). Aleks Sierz, on the other hand, notes: "[W]hat she [Kane] admired most about Beckett was his sense of overcoming the darkness. When I talked to her, she emphasised that she was essentially interested in love and affection. 'I don't find my plays depressing or lacking in hope,' she said. 'To create something beautiful about despair, or out of a feeling of despair, is for me the most hopeful, life-affirming thing a person can do'" ("Sarah Kane").

> Jeremy Herbert's scenography, described as 'a series of vividly lit, cunningly designed tableaux,' where characters 'lie on violently tilted hospital beds' or 'sprawl on steeply raked platforms as if stuck in a fly trap,' seemed to come close at times to Artaudian conception of theatre whereby 'the archetypal theatre language will be formed around staging not simply viewed as one degree of refraction of the script on stage, but as a starting point of theatrical creation.' (Saunders 86 – 87)

Within this world, the characters function as theatrical entities embodying palpable human emotions without fully developed psychological lives: their language is "flat and enervated, which reduces [them] … to mere bodies and voices" (Waters 380). In their interactions, they are grouped into four pairs of lovers – Rod and Carl, Graham and Grace, Robin (whose love is unreciprocated) and Grace, and Tinker and Woman. Aside from these sets of relationships, all the characters are subjected to physical torture by Tinker, whose role in this university campus-turned-death camp is most flexible and constantly shifting. Often depicted as a sort of evil doctor ("I'm a doctor," he says at one point (122)) yet claiming early in the play that he's "a dealer not a doctor" (107), Tinker's role at first seems to be that of a straightforward villain. Saunders, for example, notes: "Tinker is certainly a meddler in the fates of his charges, testing their desires, their delusions and professions of love; often to savagely logical conclusions" (96).

Yet at the same time his savage experiments are combined with equally savage attempts to help his charges. Early in the play, Tinker helps Graham by giving him a little extra heroin, injecting it into his eye (108). When Graham declares, "I want out," Tinker thinks about it and refuses to let Graham go. Graham then pleads for a little more of the drug, and Tinker tries to dissuade him, almost pleading:

Tinker You know what will happen to me?

Graham Yes.

Tinker It's just the beginning.

Graham Yes.

Tinker You'll leave me to that?

Graham We're not friends.

Pause.

Tinker No. (107 – 108)

What we see in this scene is that the action of the play is set in motion by an act of kindness, a sacrifice that Tinker commits to help Graham, and which motivates the rest of the play and Tinker's role in it via a kind of dream-logic. Yet this sacrifice is at best ambiguous, in light of the fact that it involves an injection of heroin into Graham's eye as well as Tinker's refusal to let Graham out (at the same time, whether Tinker has the power to allow Graham out is a question not fully answered by the play). Similarly, near the end of the play, Tinker helps Grace in her attempt to become one with her brother, Graham, by performing an operation on her, removing her breasts and grafting her brother's penis onto her body. When Grace/Graham say that they "[f]elt it" – 'it' referring, presumably, to the pain of the operation – Tinker repeats what he said to Graham at the opening of the play: "I'm sorry. I'm not really a doctor," after which "[h]e kisses Grace very gently" and leaves (145 – 146).

Tinker's villain-status is further complicated by the fact that even though he is someone who "systematically attempts to destroy love in others," like the other characters of *Cleansed* he is himself "yearning to express and reciprocate love" (Saunders 98). In a number of scenes in which he interacts with an unnamed Woman whom he calls Grace after he presumably falls for Graham's sister, Tinker "betrays his desperate need for affection in a peep-show booth" (Urban, "An Ethics" 43). Here, for example, is the final exchange between Tinker and Woman, in which Tinker finally abandons his attempts to define her in terms of and in relation to Grace, the unattainable other woman:

They hold each other, him inside her, not moving.

Woman Are you here?

Tinker Yes.

Woman Now.

Tinker Yes.

Woman With me.

Tinker Yes.

Pause.

Tinker What's your name?

Woman Grace.

Tinker No, I meant –

Woman I know. It's Grace.

Tinker (*Smiles.*) I love you, Grace. (149)

Unlike the cruel Tinker we often see in his relationships with Carl and Rod, with Grace and Robin, Tinker is here figured as just another "fellow inmate" (Urban, "The Body's Cruel Joke" 161), returning to the role he arguably occupies in the play's early moments, during his first exchange with Graham. Like Tarantino's Colonel Landa, then, Tinker is both an aggressor and a victim (or, as Aston notes: all "the figures [including Tinker] in *Cleansed* are … [both] victims and transgressors" (92)). Ultimately, Tinker assumes a place among other characters in the play by functioning under the same logic of love and pain: "Tinker," writes Aston, "who punishes and tortures … [also] damages himself through the damage he causes to others" (92 – 93). As a result of the play's formal strategies, of the characters' sparse language, and of the way the relationships between these characters are (loosely) organised, all characters – importantly, including Tinker – "become a [mere] montage of separate characteristics or an amalgam of roles" (Murphy, qtd. in Wallace 221). What remains after Kane "removes the psychological signposts and social geography that you get in the Great British play," concludes Clare Wallace quoting James Macdonald, the director of the first performances of *Cleansed*, "is a play of synthetic

fragments which as one reviewer remarked 'accumulate' rather than 'unfold'" (221). This violent and disfiguring play of synthetic fragments "translat[es] the figurative into the literal … making the body the site of trauma" (Wallace 221) and, by doing so, making this body the basis upon which the grotesque ontology of *Cleansed* is built.

Both Kane and Tarantino, then, overcome quantitative multiplicity of bodies-as-organisms via grotesque ontology's triadic structure by tinkering with, removing, and ignoring the signposts of individuality of personalities and (ultimately) of bodies, and by performing de-forming violence upon these bodies. The world within which these bodies function is, therefore, a world founded on the principles of grotesque ontology. In this world, matter is individuated (via characters) but ultimately undifferentiated – it exists, as previously noted, within a kind of thermodynamically closed system in which work and force are exchanged, exerted by matter upon itself, but neither matter nor work is ever exchanged with its surroundings (i.e. with some transcendental 'beyond'). The human form and its deformation become, consequently, the most important modes (in a quasi-Spinozian sense) of specifically political expression of Kane's play and Tarantino's film.

There is, we should note, a considerable difference at the heart of the two visions of redistribution of the perceptible delineated here. While Tarantino's characters are most often victims of circumstances, and the violence they partake in is a result of their clinging desperately to the existing distribution of multiplicities, to the (once) existing social ordering, Kane's characters often give themselves voluntarily over to violence, finding in it – or through it – avenues of change and redistribution. Tarantino's movies often bespeak the socially-transformative aspects of revenge violence distributed in them (in movies such as *Kill Bill*, *Inglourious Basterds*, and most recently *Django Unchained*) as directed at "the institutional

power structures that command, support and legitimize … [individuals'] actions" so that "the revenge climax [generally] alludes to the fundamental social issue of the distribution of the right to violence, in each case seizing it from the 'evil' representatives of the fictional status quo and wielding it against them in the name of justice" (Rieder 42). However, characters in Tarantino's films are always driven by a sense of personal injustice. Revenge is, in this context, a private affair, never motivated by goals of social or even personal transformation. Basterds' assaults on Nazis and Raine's assault on Landa are, in this context, machinations of social forces operating through the bodies of individuals[21]. And although these forces often operate through masculine bodies, *Kill Bill*, *Jackie Brown*, *Death Proof*, and even *IB* – through the character of Shosanna played by Mélanie Laurent – demonstrate the explicitly and specifically feminine struggles that work themselves through bodies in Tarantino's films.

---

[21] Think, here, of the speech Jules Winnfield (played by Samuel L. Jackson) delivers in *Pulp Fiction* before each 'hit,' which – when, motivated by what he perceives as a miracle, Jules finally reflects on it – leads him to leave his chosen profession: "The path of the righteous man is beset on all sides by the inequities of the selfish and the tyranny of evil men. Blessed is he who, in the name of charity and good will, shepherds the weak through the valley of darkness, for he is truly his brother's keeper and the finder of lost children. And I will strike down upon thee with great vengeance and furious anger those who attempt to poison and destroy my brothers. And you will know my name is the Lord when I lay my vengeance upon you" (Tarantino and Avary). Near the end of the film, as Jules decides to become "like Caine in 'KUNG FU.' Just walk from town to town, meet people, get in adventures," he comments on his prepared speech: "I been sayin' that shit for years. And if you ever heard it, it meant your ass. I never really questioned what it meant. I thought it was just a coldblooded thing to say to a motherfucker 'fore you popped a cap in his ass. But I saw some shit this mornin' made me think twice. Now I'm thinkin', it could mean you're the evil man. And I'm the righteous man. And Mr. .45 here, he's the shepherd protecting my righteous ass in the valley of darkness. Or it could by you're the righteous man and I'm the shepherd and it's the world that's evil and selfish. I'd like that. But that shit ain't the truth. The truth is you're the weak. And I'm the tyranny of evil men. But I'm tryin'. I'm tryin' real hard to be a shepherd" (Tarantino and Avary). Another example is Tarantino's most recent film, *Django Unchained*, in which an ex-slave's revenge is motivated by injustice done to him personally and, more importantly, to his wife.

Conversely, scenes in *Cleansed* – of Grace's voluntary subjection to Tinker's operation in which she has Graham's penis grafted onto her body (145 – 146); of Carl's refusal to give up on Rod in face of Tinker's continual removal of Carl's body parts designed to destroy Carl's love of Rod and his ability to express this love, and of Rod's sacrifice for Carl in which he volunteers to be killed instead of Carl (142); and lastly of Grace/Graham and Carl's disfigured bodies holding each other lovingly at the end of the play (151 – 152) – consistently depict active "depropriation," a kind of "giving up [of] a possession or a right to possession, even [and especially] if it can be proven that one does not really own that possession in the first place" (Boon 236). As such, Kane's play here depicts a

> willingness to relate to the world without imposing conditions of ownership in doing so, an ethics of care that does not require ownership, that requires an ethos other than that of ownership in order for there to be caring. … [This] means allowing [something, a body] to circulate according to context, and therefore to remove [it] from the logic of appropriation, and from enslavement to a particular context that is naturalized as "what must be." (Boon 224)

For example, Carl's and Rod's patient love for one another even after Carl's betrayal of Rod under torture, and Rod's eventual promise of eternal love and his sacrifice, are precisely the kind of active depropriation Boon describes. So, while Tarantino is primarily concerned with a depiction of social forces which work themselves through individuals via acts of violence, Kane is more concerned with how acts of violence open up room for active sacrifice, and a kind of active redistribution of the perceptible this sacrifice allows.

Nevertheless, this distinction is somewhat troubled by the fact that, as I noted earlier, *Cleansed*'s characters are not attempts to represent psychologically veritable characters, but are

rather a "montage of separate characteristics or an amalgam of roles" (Murphy, qtd. in Wallace 221) left after Kane has "remove[d] the psychological signposts and social geography that you get in the Great British play" in order to produce "a play of synthetic fragments which … 'accumulate' rather than 'unfold'" (221). Furthermore, behind this apparent distinction between Kane's work and that of Tarantino lies, as I noted above, a common strategy of overcoming quantitative multiplicity of bodies-as-organisms via grotesque ontology's triadic structure. The world within which these bodies function is, therefore, founded on the principles of grotesque ontology in which matter is individuated but ultimately undifferentiated. The human form and its deformation become, therefore, (allow me to reiterate) the most important modes of specifically political expression of Kane's play and Tarantino's film, an expression that emerges from the grotesque's overcoming of bodies as organisms, as quantitative multiplicity, *as one*.

Now the World Is Gone, I'm Just One

To begin, the body is *one*; it is the one-count – the basic unit of quantitative multiplicity, or what Badiou defines as a "multiple" that "will have been counted as one, on the basis of not having been one" (*Being and Event* 24). In other words, the one is that which has always-already been given a unity: it is "a law of the multiple, in the double sense of being what constrains the multiple to manifest itself as such, and what rules its structured composition" (25)[22]. So, for example, the body intact is in our context the one which allows various multiples

[22] Žižek writes: "The axis of Badiou's theoretic edifice is, as the title of his main work indicates, the gap between Being and Event. 'Being' stands for the positive ontological order accessible to Knowledge, for the infinite multitude of that which presents itself in our experience, categorized by genus and species in terms of its properties. At bottom, as it were, lies the pure multiple, the not yet symbolically structured multitude of experience, that which is given; this multitude is not a multitude of Ones, since the counting has not yet taken place. What Badiou calls a 'situation' is any particular consistent multitude (e.g., French society, modern art):

– organs and various organ systems, veins and arteries, muscles and bones, even body's cells and elemental composition – to manifest themselves as both what they are (as such) and as systematically structured by their function in relation to the body.

It is upon this one-count that the classical/neoclassical (in contradistinction to the grotesque) aesthetic mode is founded. The aesthetic category of the beautiful, which is the main principle of neoclassical aesthetics, is established on the "bourgeois conception of the completed atomized being" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 24), on "the classic images of the finished, completed man, cleansed … of all the scoriae of birth and development" (25). Johann Joachim Winckelmann, "the father of modern art history" (Harrison, Wood, and Gaiger 450) and one of the most important figures in the rise of neoclassical art in late-18th century Europe, for example, notes

---

a situation is structured, and it is its structure which allows us to 'count' it 'as One.' Here, however, the first cracks in the ontological edifice of Being appear: in order for us to 'count' it 'as One,' the *reduplicatio* proper to symbolization (symbolic inscription) of a situation must be at work, that is, in order for a situation to be 'counted as One,' its structure must always already involve a metastructure which designates it as One. … When a situation is thus 'counted as One,' identified by its symbolic structure, we have the 'state of the situation.' (Badiou plays here on the ambiguity of the term state – 'state of things' versus 'State' in the political sense; there is no 'state of society' without a 'State' in which the structure of society is re-presented/redoubled.) This symbolic *reduplicatio* already involves the minimal dialectic of Void and Excess. The pure multiple of Being is not yet a multitude of Ones, since, as we have just seen, to have One the pure multiple must be 'counted as One'; from the standpoint of the state of a situation, the preceding multiple can only appear as nothing, so nothing is the 'proper name of Being as Being' prior to its symbolization. … The 'Excess' correlative to this Void takes two forms. On the one hand, each state of things involves at least one excessive element which, though clearly belonging to the situation, is not 'counted' by it, properly included in it (e.g., the 'nonintegrated' rabble in a societal situation): this element is presented, but not re-presented. On the other hand, there is an excess of re-presentation over presentation: the agency which brings about the passage from situation to its state (State in society) is always in excess relative to what it structures. In contrast to the impossible liberal dream of a State reduced to a service of civil society, State power is necessarily 'excessive,' that is, it never simply and transparently re-presents society, but acts as a violent intervention in what it re-presents" ("Psychoanalysis" 236 – 237).

that the Ancient Greeks "began to form certain general ideas of beauty, with regard to the proportions of the inferiour [*sic*] parts, as well as of the whole frame" (Winckelmann 12). Even though he argues that beauty in Ancient Greek art is ultimately ideal, finally surpassing natural beauty found in the world, Winckelmann also notes that this ideal beauty is based on "imitation of Nature" within which process "ideas of unity and perfection" play a paramount role (19). Edmund Burke, whose 1757 treatise on aesthetics theorises the beautiful and the sublime, similarly stresses that unity and perfection in physiognomy "ha[ve] a considerable share in beauty, especially in that of our own species" (107), even if "a thing may be very ugly with any proportions" (108): "to form a finished human beauty," he concludes, "the [human] face must be expressive of such gentle and amiable qualities, as correspond with softness, smoothness, and delicacy of the outward form" (107).

As I already stressed, the grotesque relies on this understanding of the body as one through its invocation of the body intact. The one-count of the human body is, in both film and theatre, generally evoked early: in film, the opening credits usually assign one name/body to each role while in theatre the list of dramatis personae performs the same function. This count can be complicated by double casting in film or theatre, in which either one body is assigned to two roles or two bodies are assigned to a single role[23], but in both Tarantino's *IB* and Kane's *Cleansed* the one-count is utilised straightforwardly as each body (actor) is assigned one role (even though, as we will see, the very end of *Cleansed* problematizes this neat utilisation of the one-count with an instance of double-casting). At the beginning, then, the bodies in both these

[23] It is not surprising, in light of the political nature of aesthetics, that double casting often carries critical social or political significance. Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine*, for example, uses double casting as well as cross-gender and cross-race casting in order to criticise the gender politics of patriarchy and its relation to imperialism and slavery. The recent film, *Cloud Atlas* (2012), written and directed by Tom Tykwer and Andy and Lana Wachowski, does the same.

works establish the one-count as these works' original arithmetic: quantitative multiplicity is written into their very opening paratexts.

Figure 3: The one-count of *Inglourious Basterds*' opening credits

The body in both *IB* and in *Cleansed* is, in other words, initially presented as an *organism*, "a phenomenon of accumulation, coagulation, and sedimentation that, in order to extract useful labor from the BwO [Body without Organs in Deleuze-Guattarian parlance or a grotesque body in the present context], imposes upon it forms, functions, bonds, dominant and hierarchized organizations, organized transcendences[24]" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 159). At the beginning of *IB*, for example, we witness a courteous yet tense exchange between a French peasant, Perrier LaPadite, who is hiding a Jewish family under the floorboards of his home, and Colonel Hans Landa of the S.S., the aforementioned "Jew Hunter." As noted earlier, Tarantino exploits the historical knowledge the audience brings to the movie to construct an ostensible dichotomy between the innocent, good French peasant and the evil Nazi colonel. What we subsequently witness in this scene are two organisms – formed and hierarchized by their socio-political

[24] As we can see here, Badiou's notion of "count-as-one" and Deleuze's notion of the organism upon which BwO is built share some important features.

positions in the world the knowledge of which the audience supplies and which is corroborated by certain genre conventions of the film – pitted against one another. The opening scene of *Cleansed* similarly presents two organisms hierarchized by their social position within the fenced-in university/camp: Graham (heroin addict, patient) and Tinker (dealer, doctor).

These organisms then go to work on one another: Landa's razor-sharp yet casually presented logic wears LaPadite down and makes him (and the audience) complicit in the killing of all but one of the Jews he is hiding. The penetration of LaPadite's body is not here literal, but the suspense built up in the scene makes it palpable via the physical and anxious reaction of the audience (and LaPadite). It also results in the massacre of the Jewish family hiding beneath the floorboards, the massacre that will later in the film be echoed by the slaughter of Hitler and the Nazi top brass at the premiere of Goebbels's film. Conversely, the organisms' work on one another in *Cleansed* is presented as starkly physical and material – as more directly grotesque. As Tinker "[i]njects [heroin] into the corner of Graham's eye" (108), they instigate the play's action and the multiple de-formations of the organism that are about to take place.

Moreover, like Landa and LaPadite in *IB*, Graham and Tinker initiate the general theme of transformation of the organism into a grotesque body. We can characterise this body-made-grotesque through its violation in terms of Badiou's more general, abstract definition of the body, which is for him "the set of elements of a site" that is not necessarily organic (in the present context that focuses on the elaboration of the grotesque as the deformation of the human form, however, the body is exclusively organic). These elements of a site "entertain with the resurrection of the inexistent (consciousness and life) a relationship of maximal proximity." The body, continues Badiou, "is the set of everything that the trace of the event mobilizes … [and] these elements [of this set] incorporate themselves into the evental present." A body is thus

"composed of all the elements of the site … that subordinate themselves, with maximal intensity, to that which was nothing and becomes all" (*Logics of Worlds* 466 – 468). The grotesque deformation of the body is, as noted earlier, always an overcoming of quantitative multiplicity which, in terms of Badiou's elaboration, we can describe as an event-move from the one-count of the organism to the creation of a grotesque body, a quasi-Deleuzean BwO created by subtracting the one/whole from the multiples which go into making it (n – 1).

What Badiou's definition of the body allows us to see more clearly is that the organism itself, before its grotesque deformation, is also composed of a set of multiples arranged in terms of a functional and homeostatic stability[25]. This is precisely what allows for the redistribution of the perceptible that these two texts engage in via the grotesque. Both the organism and the grotesque body, in other words, are ruled by the same logic: that of what we referred to as MULTIPLICITY. In Badiou's terminology, this logic is the logic of the event around which a body is mobilized. Žižek, reading Badiou, describes this as a "traumatic encounter with the Real," noting that the event reconfigures the given structure (i.e. it redistributes the perceptible) and opens up a possibility of a "new readability of the situation" on the basis of "accept[ing] the wager that such an event [as has just taken place] exists" ("Psychoanalysis" 242). As we will see below, not only is the body itself reconfigured by this event but these grotesque moments of a text also allow for a reconfiguration of the text and our reading of this text as a whole.

Badiou, however, argues that the site of an event is "not a part of the situation," or that "[t]he site, itself, is presented, but 'beneath' it nothing from which it is composed of is presented" (*Being and Event* 175). As such, as Žižek notes of Badiou's conceptualisation of it,

[25] I will explore this idea – and the notion of the grotesque as indexing the Real – more fully in Chapter 4, in the discussion of the relationship between the plasticity of time and the (human) brain, and the subjectivity that emerges from them.

> *an Event emerges ex nihilo*. But the fact that it cannot be accounted for in the terms of the situation does not mean that it is simply an intervention from Outside or Beyond: it attaches itself, precisely, to the Void of every situation – to its inherent inconsistency and/or its Excess. The Event is the Truth of the situation, that which renders visible/ readable what the "official" state of the situation had to "repress," but it is also always localized, that is, the Truth is always the Truth of a specific situation. ("Psychoanalysis" 237, emphasis added)

The grotesque, on the other hand, aligns more closely with the Deleuzean notion of disjunctive synthesis, in that it does not emerge *ex nihilo*, but is rather driven by matter's work upon itself, with the added caveat that while in Deleuze the stress is placed on a potentially infinitely proliferating series, the grotesque functions within a realist framework within which structure continually persists. This is so because of the general indispensability of the (human) body for continuation of (human) life[26], as well as because the field of the socio-political in which the contemporary grotesque functions (i.e. late capitalism) is premised on an open embrace of contradiction – of carnivalisation and "constant self-revolutionizing, … reversals, crises, [and] reinventions" (Žižek, *Organs* 212 – 213) – which reduces (but does not erase) the import of, and makes problematic, the use of traditional Marxist concepts such as *ideology*, *repression*, and *internal contradiction*. The Badiouian notion of the event nevertheless remains valuable for our discussion of the grotesque because: a) it highlights points of agreement and disagreement between Badiou and Deleuze, a topic interesting both in itself and insofar as it reveals a kind of

[26] Admittedly, even Deleuze and Guattari stress the need for the maintenance of a "minimum of strata, a minimum of forms and functions, a minimal subject from which to extract materials, affects, and assemblages" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 270); but this minimum of forms and functions is only maintained in the interest of continually proliferating series – deterritorializations – in the ceaseless play between the actual and the virtual.

politics of the grotesque at work in their theories, and b) it allows us to see the grotesque's overcoming of quantitative multiplicity in terms of a revealing of art's specifically progressive political and ethical potentiality, as will be discussed below.

The quasi-Badiouian sites of *IB* and of *Cleansed* are dominated by this logic of grotesque ontology. They are, as described above, closed systems within which matter exerts work and force upon itself – within which matter acts upon matter. Furthermore, within the spaces of these sites, the grotesque event is the repeated moment of bodily deformation, and as such it, paradoxically, (disjunctively) synthesises Deleuze's and Badiou's notions of *chance*, a concept evoked by the logic that the structure of the event imposes upon a situation. Because opening up a possibility of a "new readability of the situation"requires "accept[ing] *the wager* that such an event exists" (Žižek, "Psychoanalysis" 242, emphasis added), chance becomes here doubly present: in the very act of acceptance of this wager and in the continued/sustained fidelity to the truth of the event, whose outcome is never guaranteed and in relation to which the subject of truth is constituted[27]. In fusing Deleuze's and Badiou's notions of chance, the grotesque event can consequently be characterised as being:

a) Ontologically *unique* (Deleuze) – always dominated by the logic of grotesque ontology which overcomes quantitative multiplicity, yet also ontologically separate (Badiou) – always occurring "*in* the situation without being in anyway [*sic*] virtualizable" (Badiou, *Deleuze* 73 – 75)[28];

[27] For Badiou's discussion of the event and the creation of its subject, see *Being and Event*, 232 – 239.

[28] Badiou's book on Deleuze, entitled *Deleuze: The Clamour of Being*, is a work of critique, which effectively delineates the major disagreements between Deleuze and Badiou's philosophical positions. In a chapter entitled "Eternal Return and Chance" (67 – 77), Badiou discusses the different conceptualizations of chance in their respective philosophical systems, noting that for Deleuze chance is ultimately an expression of the

b) An "affirmation of the totality of chance" (Deleuze) (74) *and*, at the same time, an "absolutely distinct" occurrence that is "sporadic … and cannot be totalized" (Badiou) (76). It is an affirmation of the totality of chance by consistently reaffirming the univocity of matter; it is sporadic and distinct by virtue of matter's singular self-overcoming.

c) An *eternal return* of the "original unique throw of the dice with the power of affirming chance" (Deleuze) (74) via *an eternal return of matter*, and (at the same time) a singular example of "multiplicity (and rarity) of chances, such that the chance of an event happens to us already by chance, and not by the expressive univocity of the One" (Badiou) (76).

This paradoxical nature of the grotesque event is what ultimately, on an abstract level, provokes anxiety or concurrent responses of horror/disgust and laughter in its audience[29]. On this abstract

---

"metaphysics of the One" (11): "Deleuze's fundamental problem is most certainly not to liberate the multiple but to submit thinking to a renewed concept of the One," Badiou writes (11), adding later, "the indiscernibility of casts [of the dice] (of events, of emissions of the virtual) was, for him, the most important of the points of passage of the One. For me, on the other hand, the absolute ontological separation of the event, the fact that it occurs in the situation without being in any way virtualizable, is the basis of the character of truths as irreducibly original, created, and fortuitous. … For Deleuze, chance is the play of the All, always replayed as such; whereas I believe that there is a multiplicity (and rarity) of chances, such that the chance of an event happens to us already by chance, and not by the expressive univocity of the One" (75 – 76). What I'd like to point out in relation to the onto/logic of the grotesque is that it disjunctively unites these two conceptualizations in the process of matter's singular self-overcoming.

[29] Philip Thomson, for example, writes of Michael Steig's definition of the grotesque: "In an article entitled 'Defining the Grotesque: An Attempt at Synthesis' … Michael Steig tries to formulate this paradox of the grotesque: that it both liberates or disarms and creates anxiety. Steig's point of departure is the definition by Thomas Cramer…: 'the grotesque is the feeling of anxiety aroused by means of the comics pushed to an extreme,' but conversely 'the grotesque is the defeat, by means of the comic, of anxiety in the face of the inexplicable'…. Working with the Freudian notions of taboos, regression and infantile fears, Steig arrives at

level, the grotesque event is both a signifier of a kind of joyous liberation – being of its situation, sporadic, multiple, and distinct – and a signifier of the eternal return of the same which, as Deleuze notes, is closely linked with metamorphosis and is often a harbinger of fear and anxiety[30] (we will return to anxiety, metamorphosis, and the grotesque in the final chapter).

The grotesque event is therefore in this context built on the (paradoxical) disjunctively synthetic relationship between the One and the multiple/Many (and between the Deleuzean and the Badiouian notions of chance). This does not mean that each event is grotesque but, rather, that the grotesque ontological framework developed earlier on the basis of examples of this aesthetic mode functions as one instance of an ontological event in which multiplicities express

---

his own psychological definition of the grotesque: "The grotesque involves the managing of the uncanny by the comic. More specifically: (a) When the infantile material is primarily threatening, comic techniques, including caricature, diminish the threat through degradation or ridicule; but at the same time, they may also enhance anxiety through their aggressive implications and through the strangeness they lend to the threatening figure. (b) In what is usually called the comic-grotesque, the comic in its various forms lessens the threat of identification with infantile drives by means of ridicule; at the same time, it lulls the inhibitions and makes possible on a preconscious level the same identification that it appears to the conscience or super-ego to prevent. In short, both extreme types of the grotesque [i.e. the predominantly threatening and the predominantly comic] … return us to childhood – the one attempts a liberation from fear, while the other attempts a liberation from inhibition; but in both a state of unresolved tension is the most common result, because of the intrapsychic conflicts involved'" (60). Similarly, Geoffrey Galt Harpham writes of the grotesque and its relationship to taboo: "Primitives worship the taboo, but modern secular adults are so indebted to and dependent upon their discriminatory grids that they find the taboo mostly a source of anxiety, horror, astonishment, laughter, or revulsion" (*On the Grotesque* 4).

[30] In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze writes: "Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* is clearly a drama, a theatrical work. The largest part of the book is taken up with the before, in the mode of a defect or of the past: this act is too big for me (compare the idea of 'criminal blame,' or the whole comic story of the death of God, or *Zarathustra's fear before the revelation of eternal return* – 'your fruits are ripe but you are not ripe for your fruits'). Then comes the moment of the caesura or *the metamorphosis*, 'The Sign,' when Zarathustra becomes capable. The third moment remains absent: this is the moment of the revelation and affirmation of eternal return, *and implies the death of Zarathustra*" (92, emphasis added).

univocity of matter (we will see below how this ontology is reflected in the socio-political/historical realm of and in the present moment). As Deleuze writes,

> Events are produced in a chaos, in a chaotic multiplicity, but only under the condition that a sort of screen intervenes. Chaos … is inseparable from a screen that makes something – something rather than nothing – emerge from it. Chaos would be a pure *Many*, a purely disjunctive diversity, while the something is a *One*, not a pregiven unity, but instead the indefinite article that designates a certain singularity. (*The Fold* 76)

The seat of both the One that intervenes to produce something from chaos and of the chaotic multiplicity itself is, in the grotesque, to be found in bodily matter and its self-transcendence and organization. And out of this matter, out of the self-overcoming of the one-count of the organism, emerges a body whose "belonging to the situation of its site is undecidable from the standpoint of the situation itself" (Badiou, *Being and Event* 181). But while Deleuze stresses the chaos of (virtual) multiplicity, the grotesque here reminds us again of the persistence of structure: chaos is, in this context, only an affirmation of the Badiouian notion of the event, according to which what looks like chaos is often (but not always) a misperception of the new distribution of the perceptible triggered by an event. It is this feature of the grotesque that allows for a text to be read differently – against its apparent narrative logic. It is also what opens up the possibility of thinking about and postulating new historical constellations in the interest of exploding history as a linear narrative.

Here, again, the paradoxical character of the grotesque event becomes apparent. On the one hand, with the event, "nothing will have taken place but place" (Mallarmé, qtd. in Badiou, *Being and Event* 196). From our established (conventional) perspective, the deformation of the body is a sort of non-event – it simply reaffirms that which we already know and understand.

Lieutenant Aldo Raine's carving a swastika into Colonel Hans Landa's forehead at the end of *IB*, for example, is in this sense nothing but a completion of a revenge flick in which execution and mutilation of evil brings forth in its audience simple visceral pleasure: here, there is no ethical cut or rupture introduced with this act, and the dichotomy between Good and Evil is reaffirmed. Tinker's grafting Graham's genitalia onto Grace's body at the end of Kane's *Cleansed* is simply the last of Tinker's many acts of cruelty, and a reaffirmation of his character as jailer and torturer. These acts of disfigurement, then, allow the apparent logic of Kane's and Tarantino's works to resume uninterrupted and are as such not strictly grotesque but, more simply, disgusting: "That 'nothing' has taken place therefore means solely that nothing *decidable within the situation* could figure the event as such. By causing the place to prevail over the idea that an event could be calculated therein … [Mallarmé's] poem [titled "Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hazard," as do *IB* and *Cleansed*] realizes the essence of the event itself, which is precisely that of being, from this point of view, incalculable" (Badiou, *Being and Event* 197). Consequently, it is not surprising that accepting *IB* as a revenge flick and *Cleansed* as a story that divides its protagonists into perpetrators and victims of violence produces coherent readings of these texts.

In fact, it is upon these readings – which accept that nothing decidable has taken place within the situation they present – that Hollywood relies as a marketing strategy for films such as *IB*. Indeed, much of its mass appeal and marketability come from understanding Tarantino's film as a simple revenge flick. Witness, for example, some of the positive reviews of the film aggregated on *rottentomatoes.com*: "*Inglourious Basterds* is … a lot of fun, altering history for the better as the Nazis feel the force of redemption," writes Sam Bathe for *Fan the Fire Magazine*; "Gutsy, pleasurable and very satisfying. Packaged together by the amazing Quentin Tarantino, this film will slap you in the face and say: '… what a way to end the summer,'" writes

Jolene Mendez for the *Entertainment Spectrum*; "This is a revenge fantasy where the non-Jewish Tarantino wants us to cheer on the violent Jews because – as we see – their victims more than deserve their fates," writes Daniel M. Kimmel for *New England Movies Weekly*; "I don't know if I've ever seen a revenge fantasy so wilfully messed up, sometimes offensively so, that still manages to be worthwhile for whole sections of its 2½ hours," writes Micheal Phillips for the *Chicago Tribune*[31]. By not recognizing the grotesque deformation of Nazi bodies as an ethically troubling act, these critics read *IB* simply as fun summer fare. Because of this misrecognition of the grotesque as nothing but viscerally pleasurable revenge-drama, the grotesque as an event which could potentially reorganize the entire reading of the text (as well as the text itself) goes unnoticed: in order for it to function properly, someone (a Badiouian subject) must "accept the wager that [the grotesque as] such an event exists" (Žižek, "Psychoanalysis" 242).

In order for this to happen, we must accept this wager, and see the grotesque event as introducing a potential cut into the situation out of which it emerges: "a pure cut in becoming made by an object of the world, through that object's auto-appearance" (Badiou, *Logics of Worlds* 385). This cut is, however, only potential until it is recognised as an event: there must take place "an intervention" whose initial operation is "to make a name out of an unrepresented element of the site to qualify the event whose site is the site" (Badiou, *Being and Event* 204). In cases of the grotesque, this intervention is always ontologically *unique*: it involves recognising the overcoming of quantitative multiplicity via the triadic structure of the grotesque. The possibility of this recognition/intervention, however, depends largely on the way in which the instance of singular grotesque transformation fits into the entirety of the text within which it takes place, and on the form matter's work upon itself takes within the space of its site/text. In

[31] See http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/inglourious_basterds/

other words, as the grotesque is never anything more than "a 'moment' in literature (as in art) that is manifested in image or event" (Barasch, "The Grotesque as a Comic Genre" 4), it must – in order to be recognised – take its place in the whole of its text, and it must do so in a specific way, as follows.

The relationship between the text such as *IB* or *Cleansed* and its grotesque moments is ultimately one of mutual presupposition – these two components are paired as content and expression, the relationship of which can be summarised by repeating an idea found in the Introduction: what we have here is a creation of another dialogic relationship, in this case between the grotesque image and its world (the text), in which the text always comes first (i.e. we must start with it) but is not, therefore, somehow primary or sovereign. Indeed, the text and its grotesque moments are isomorphic with reciprocal presupposition. In other words, it is only with its grotesque moments that the text receives full consistency: functioning as an "act which retroactively opens up its own possibility" (Žižek, *The Parallax View* 203), the grotesque moment can only be derived from the text but is, at the same time, that which gives this text its basic fabric or texture – its fundamental meaning. At the moment the organism is transformed into a grotesque body, the text and its meanings also metamorphose. When Raine cuts a swastika into Landa's forehead, the dichotomy between good and evil in Tarantino's film collapses. Even though it does not erase the division between those who are morally more or less sympathetic and those who are morally repugnant, this division is shown to be suspect and ultimately a question of socio-political positioning. Despite the fact that the film does not fall into the trap of moral relativism, it successfully presents two evils, one of which is momentarily

more acceptable than the other[32]. Similarly, when Tinker is finally established as only another inmate of the university campus/camp through his relationship with the Woman and, more importantly, his attempt to help Grace by grafting her brother's genitalia onto her body, the logic of Kane's play is transformed and the grotesque events of *Cleansed* become recognisable as such by transforming the world out of which they emerge, firmly establishing *love* as the main preoccupation of the stage action.

Grotesque events – bodily deformations that result from matter's action upon itself – therefore reconfigure not just the organism, turning it into a grotesque body, but they also reconfigure the reality within which they take place. As Rancière notes, this is none other than the defining characteristic of modern democratic literature as such: it is "a new way of linking the sayable and the visible, words and things" (*Politics of Literature* 9) as well as a "redistribution of space and time, place and identity, speech and noise, the visible and the invisible" (4). It is not surprising, therefore, that Rancière sees the rise of what he calls "literary democracy" in contradistinction to neoclassical aesthetic principles, describing the rise of this literary democracy by utilising diction laden with terms associated with the grotesque: we can, he writes, "oppose 'literary democracy' to the classical order of representation" (11) and find its examples in Flaubert, Balzac, and Hugo whose writing "is the opposite of any specific use of language proper" as "it spells the reign of indistinctiveness, of impropriety" (13). In Balzac's *La Peau de chagrin*, Rancière finds "the poem of the great equality of things noble and vile, ancient and modern, decorative and utilitarian," and in the Paris sewers of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*

[32] Tarantino does something similar in his screenplay for the Robert Rodriguez-directed 1996 film *From Dusk Till Dawn* in which the 'evil' of two criminals who kidnap a family to get across the border into Mexico is suddenly put into a different perspective when they are all attacked by Mexican vampires in a biker and trucker bar called "The Titty Twister."

he finds "the 'pit of truth' where masks drop and the signs of social grandeur are brought down to the same level as the detritus of ordinary life" (15). Most importantly, democratic speech of this literature is "written on the body of things, taken from the sons and daughters of the plebeians" (14), making up a "horrible" and "revolting poetry based on the mixing up of genres, activities and ages … where everything merges, where the setting that merchandise is sold in is a match for a fantastical grotto," where "inside and outside merge" and the

> novel's descriptive profusions express something quite different from a supposedly democratic consumer frenzy. You don't consume in Balzac's shops: you read in them the symptoms of the new times, you recognize in them the remains of worlds in ruins, you meet in them the equivalent of defunct mythological divinities. The modern world they emblematize is a vast fabric of signs, ruins and fossils that equate the new poetry, the poetry of the world's prose, to the work of the philologists, archaeologists and geologists. But it is also a world repopulated by fantastical creatures, camped behind all the shopfronts or lurking behind all the portes cochéres; by new divinities from the earth and the underworld. Literature is indissolubly both a science of society and the creation of a new mythology. This is the basis on which the sameness of a poetics and a politics can be defined. (19 – 20)

It is this kind of literary democracy that permeates Tarantino's film and Kane's play as they create literary (filmic and theatrical) *dissensus*: a demonstration of "a gap in the sensible itself" that makes visible "that which had no reason to be seen" by "plac[ing] one world in another" (Rancière, *Dissensus* 38) and by reconfiguring space through grotesque bodily de-formation[33].

[33] Even though what Rancière elaborates here can easily be described in terms of the grotesque, as this term has been conceptualized in this work, Rancière see the democratic/ethical potential of art in a number of different aesthetic categories: e.g. sublime, picturesque, grotesque. Rancière therefore utilises the term

Literature, then – and via literature, film and drama – "deals with democracy not as some 'reign of the masses' but as excess in the relationship of bodies to words. Democracy is first and foremost the invention of words by means of which those who don't count make themselves count and so blur the ordered distribution of speech and mutism that made the political community a 'beautiful animal,' an organic totality" (Rancière, *The Politics of Literature* 40). In other words, as the physical body 'overcomes' itself and its own one-count, so do political communities overcome themselves by "putting into circulation beings in excess of any functional body count" and therewith "introducing another count that spoils the fit between bodies and meanings" (41). Grotesque logic, hence, strictly parallels political dissensus in that each "attack[s] one aspect of … [the] consensual [established, conventional] paradigm of proportion" (41). Yet, while politics "works on the whole" of the community body, "literature works on the units. Its specific form of dissensuality consists in creating new forms of individuality" that are

---

'grotesque' as strictly embedded in the history of art, and as such as only one of the ways the aesthetic is related to the ethical/political. For example, he writes: "The unrepresentable, which is the central category of the ethical tum in aesthetic reflection, is also a category that produces an indistinction between right and fact, occupying the same place in aesthetic reflection that terror does on the political plane. The idea of the unrepresentable in fact conflates two distinct notions: impossibility and interdiction. To declare that a given subject is unrepresentable by artistic means is in fact to say several things at once. It can mean that the specific means of art, or of such-and-such an art, are not adequate to represent a particular subject's singularity. This is the sense in which Burke once declared that Milton's description of Lucifer in *Paradise Lost* was unrepresentable in painting. The reason was that its sublime aspect depended upon the duplicitous play of words that do not really let us see what they pretend to show us. However, when the pictorial equivalent of the words is exposed to sight, as in paintings of the *Temptation of Saint Anthony* by artists ranging from Bosch to Dali, it becomes a picturesque or grotesque figure. Lessing's *Laokoon* presents the same argument: Lessing argues that the suffering of Virgil's Laocoön in the *Aeniad* is unrepresentable in sculpture, because its visual realism divests art of its ideality insofar as it divests the character of his dignity. Extreme suffering belonged to a reality that was, in principle, excluded from the art of the visible" (*Dissensus* 195). As we will see below, Rancière's term 'dissensus' shares some important characteristics with my elaboration of the grotesque.

"*incompatible with the form of the beautiful animal* [i.e. they are grotesque]" (41 – 42, emphasis added). Analogous to grotesque ontology, politics "comes about solely through interruption … of the community body" (Rancière, *Disagreement* 13), through "decompos[ition] and recompos[ition of] the relationship between the ways of *doing*, of *being*, and of *saying* that define perceptible organization of the community" (Rancière, *Disagreement* 40). This, however, is not strictly and solely a relationship based on analogy. Rather, it rests more firmly on the question of practices: practices of reading, of perception and interpretation, as well as of active reconfiguration of the apparently given.

Following these principles, Tarantino's *IB* reconfigures the historical space delineated by Western Europe during the Second World War both literally, by altering history, and figuratively, by toying with the strict dichotomy established between the forces of 'good' and the forces of 'evil.' As such, *IB* does not justify the atrocities committed in the past; it rather asks questions pertinent to today's socio-political condition: to quote Natoli again, it asks "[w]hether we are all Nazis now or whether we are Barbarians of Goodness who escape moral condemnation." In this, Tarantino's film also reveals the way in which the grotesque inserts itself into the realm of history, of the Symbolic socio-political expression. *IB* as a whole here becomes the marker of the "present as the 'time of the now'" (Benjamin 263) through which we can "blast open the continuum of history" (262) in the service of revealing the tensions and struggles of the present moment. History itself here becomes "the subject of the structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time" (261) marked by the simple formula "Once upon a time…." History is, rather, "time filled by the presence of the now" (261) in which "the past is seized … as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized" (255). The past, in other words, becomes reanimated not to shore up the present order but to draw attention to that which was nothing –

covered up by victories of the hegemony – and now becomes the evental site around which subjectivities loyal to its struggle can form, around which dissensus can emerge (this general lesson of *IB* and *Cleansed* will be deployed in the next two chapters where the grotesque will be read in the contexts of Thatcher's Londons and post-1968 USA).

This use of history is, furthermore, related to the grotesque's paradoxical ontological makeup, whereby the Deleuzean One and the Badiouian multiple are brought into proximity through the logic of disjunctive synthesis. So: a) the *unique* or *singular* ontological process (characterized earlier as corporeal-ontological-MULTIPLICITY) is always deployed in a particular historical configuration through which the past is mobilized in the time of the now. *IB* is in this sense a mobilization of the grotesque as a singular ontological process in the use of the Second World War as a means to explore our present status as the Barbarians of Goodness, an issue made particularly relevant in light of the recent uses of torture, drones, surveillance, etc. in the fight against global terrorism; b) this ontological process always takes place within the context of the totality/univocity of our material existence, which frames and determines the historical, while also marking each self-overcoming of matter as historically particular. Chance is, in this sense, registered as both driving our biological, material existence out of which human subjectivity emerges and the way this subjectivity becomes enmeshed in particular historical, Symbolic configurations. The former will be explored as the Real of the grotesque in the final chapter, while the latter forms the basis for the explorations of the Symbolic here and in the next two chapters; and c) the eternal return of the original, unique throw of the dice and the concurrent multiplicity and rarity of chances, finally, register the way historical materialism employs Messianic time as the end of history – the original unique throw of the dice that Benjamin's angel of history sees as "one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage"

(257) – in order to blast history open and affirm the multiplicity and rarity of chances by collecting them and their historical moments into a historical constellation as "the 'time of the now' … shot through with chips of Messianic time" (263).

Finally, in its reanimation/redistribution of history, *IB* abandons the kind of ethics built upon the principles of Otherness and on resistance to Absolute Evil, and instead builds an ethics on the principles of truths, an ethics that "tries to ward off the Evil that every singular truth makes possible" (Badiou, *Ethics* 67). In contrast to an "ethic[s] of human rights" founded on the principles of a "general human subject" and his or her "rights to non-Evil" – in which case "Evil is that from which Good is derived" (*Ethics* 9) – *IB*, as well as *Cleansed*, constructs via its grotesque logic an "ethics of processes by which we treat possibilities of a situation" in which "[m]an is to be identified by his affirmative thought, by the singular truths of which he is capable" and by the fact that "[i]t is from our positive capability for Good, and thus from our boundary-breaking treatment of possibilities and our refusal of conservatism, *including the conservation of being* [and bodies], that we are to identify Evil – not vice versa" (16, emphasis added). The extreme rather than radical Evil that Nazism represents (66), then, is dramatized in *IB* as an outcome of a political process, an attempt to seize what Badiou calls a simulacrum of truth as truth itself (72 – 77), rather than being dramatized as a radical and hence, in a way, irrepresentable evil that is frequently imagined as the founding act of the contemporary era.

Similarly, Kane's *Cleansed* reorganises its space through grotesque aesthetics in order to explore the relationship between love and torture, doing so, like *IB*, by rejecting an ethics based on avoidance of Evil and constructing an ethics of active love and depropriation. "While *Cleansed* is undoubtedly a dark play, Kane also believed it is essentially hopeful in its central theme: on how love for all the characters can survive even the most extreme and savage of

situations," writes Graham Saunders, then quoting Kane: the characters of *Cleansed* are "all just in love. I actually thought it's all very sixties and hippy. They are all emanating this great love and need and going after what they need, and the obstacles in their way are all extremely unpleasant but that's not what the play is about. What drives people is need, not the obstacle" (Saunders 91). In other words, the play is not about a negative relationship with (or avoidance of) Evil, but a positive one with love, a relationship that is here the engine of redistributions of the perceptible. The final scene of *Cleansed* beautifully paints its preoccupation with the ethics of love; here it is in its entirety:

> *The patch of mud by the perimeter fence.*
>
> *It is raining.*
> **Carl** *and* **Grace** *sit next to each other.*
> **Grace** *now looks and sounds exactly like* **Graham**. *She is wearing his clothes.*
> **Carl** *wears* **Robin***'s clothes, that is,* **Grace***'s (women's) clothes.*
> *There are two rats, one chewing at* **Grace/Graham***'s wounds, the other at* **Carl***'s.*
>
> **Grace/Graham** Body perfect.
>
> Chain smoked all day but danced like dream you'd never know.
>
> Have they done it yet?
>
> Died.
>
> Burnt.
>
> Lump of charred meat stripped of its clothes.
>
> Back to life.
>
> Why don't you ever say anything?
>
> Loved
>
> Me
>
> Hear a voice or catch a smile turning from the mirror You bastard how dare you leave me like this.
>
> Felt it.
> Here. Inside. Here.
>
> And when I don't feel it, it's pointless.
> Think about getting up it's pointless.
> Think about eating it's pointless.
> Think about dressing it's pointless.

Think about speaking it's pointless.
Think about dying only it's totally fucking pointless.

Here now.
Safe on the other side and here.

Graham.

(*A long silence*.)

Always be here.
Thank you, Doctor.

Grace/Graham *looks at* **Carl**.
Carl *is crying*.

Grace/Graham Help me.

Carl *reaches out his arm*.
Grace/Graham *holds his stump.*
They stare at the sky, **Carl** *crying.*
It stops raining.
The sun comes out.
Grace/Graham *smiles.*
The sun gets brighter and brighter, the squeaking of the rats louder and louder, until the light is blinding and the sound deafening.

Blackout.

This scene, in which love firmly and finally survives desperation, establishes the ethics of love as the dominant theme of Kane's play despite the fact that the characters remain within the space enclosed by the camp(us) walls. This love is both romantic/familial, as that between Grace and Graham, and it is also comradely, as that between Grace/Graham and Carl. When Grace/Graham is not feeling love, she/he notes, everything is "pointless" – even death is, paradoxically, pointless without love.

The grotesque redistributions and deformations of bodies and space in *Cleansed*, then, speak of a fidelity to the truth of love, a notion firmly and finally established by the fact that *the one-count of the organism has here been completely surpassed as* "**Grace** *now looks and sounds exactly like* **Graham**" (i.e. she/he is now potentially played by the actor who originally played

Graham in a momentary – evental – eruption of double casting). As Peter Hallward writes in his book on Badiou:

> Love is first and foremost a matter of literally unjustified commitment to an encounter with another person. Everything begins with the encounter. The encounter "is not destined, or predestined, by anything other than the haphazard passage of two trajectories. Before this chance encounter, there was nothing but solitudes. …" The "encounter" is not properly the encounter between two individuals, two consolidated bundles of interests and identities, but instead an experience that suspends or nullifies precisely this re-presentative notion of the two, a two as one plus one. The "power of the encounter," Badiou writes, "is such that nothing measures up to it, neither in the sentiment itself nor in the desiring body." … The true worthiness of the beloved can never be verified or proved. … Fidelity to love implies attestation before justification. The only serious question to be asked of love … is always a question about the existence of love itself: "Is it still there?" (187)

As Badiou concludes in his *Ethics*, "I call 'subject' the bearer … of a fidelity, the one who bears a process of truth" (43), and the truth of love is, as Kane notes consistently in *Cleansed*, torturous and destructive of an organism: "The lovers as such enter into the composition of *one* loving subject, who *exceeds* them both" (Badiou, *Ethics* 43). The blinding light at the end of *Cleansed* is, therefore, the final, abstractly presented, eradication of the individual, of the organism, an eradication that allows the *new body as a new structure* (as 'two' that does not equal one plus one) to persist. As Grace/Graham holds what is left of Carl's arm in her/his hand, the blinding light of the sun is here the extension of the grotesque logic and its transformation into the

aesthetics of the sublime[34] which attempts to represent the unrepresentable while also acknowledging "that the specific means of [dramatic] art … are [in this case] not adequate to represent [this] particular subject's [i.e. love's] singularity" (Rancière, *Dissensus* 195). It is through this aesthetic manoeuvre that the organism in Kane's play is finally completely destroyed, transmogrified into pure and tortuous fidelity to the event of love.

Through their construction of grotesque bodies and grotesque spaces, therefore, both Tarantino and Kane reveal art's political and ethical potentiality. They use the aesthetics of the grotesque to engage with and construct an ethics loyal to the grotesque event, an ethics of truths that overcomes that built exclusively on a humanist respect for Otherness and for the Good that is nothing but a negative product of an aversion to Evil. We should note here that, importantly, the grotesque as an aesthetic form does not in and of itself produce this truth: if it did, there would be something inherently counter-hegemonic in it. Rather, it is the grotesque moments as deployed by these texts that allow for these truths to emerge; and it is grotesque's powerful deployment of the human body *as both concept and as my own body* that make this aesthetic form a powerful tool in an elaboration of the politics of dissensus. The ethics of *Cleansed* and of *IB* is, then, built on the fidelity to dissensual truth, a truth that stems from man's "positive capability for Good," and is therefore an ethics of "processes by which we treat the possibilities of a situation" (Badiou, *Ethics* 16) firmly established, in this context, on creations of grotesque bodies and constructions of grotesque ontological spaces. These two texts also, as discussed above, open the possibility of thinking how the grotesque aesthetic form participates in the creation of historical constellations via which the present moment opens itself to the political

[34] The discussion of the relationship between the sublime and the grotesque, reaches as far back as Victor Hugo's Preface to *Cromwell*, in which he writes: "the grotesque [exists] on the reverse of the sublime" and "it is of the fruitful union of the grotesque and the sublime types that modern genius is born" (345, 346).

tensions and struggles of the past in order to locate and explore the tensions and struggles inherent within it. With the next two chapters, we will turn to the exploration of this role of the grotesque while also continuing to build on the theoretical framework elaborated heretofore.

CHAPTER TWO

Londons Calling: Thatcher, Punk, and Space(s) of Critique in Peter Ackroyd, Alan Moore, and Iain Sinclair

> "And so let us beginne; and, as the Fabrick takes its Shape in front of you, alwaies keep the structure intirely in Mind as you inscribe it. First you must measure out or cast the area in as exact a Manner as can be, and then you must draw the Plot and make the Scale. I have imparted to you the Principles of Terrour and Magnificence, for these you must represent in the due placing of Parts and Ornaments as well as in the Proportion of the several Orders."
>
> – Nicholas Dyer, *Hawksmoor*

> "Once upon a time… in Toronto."
>
> – Scott Young, *Home for Christmas and Other Stories*

Grotesque Londons

London, explicitly associated with the grotesque since at least the writings of Charles Dickens[1], is a space in which narration and praxis converge. This is a space that is not, strictly

[1] Bakhtin, for example, writes: "Renaissance grotesque imagery, directly related to folk carnival culture, as we find it in Rabelais, Cervantes, and Shakespeare, influenced the entire realistic literature of the following centuries. Realism of grand style, in Stendhal, Balzac, Hugo, and Dickens, for instance, was always linked directly or indirectly with the Renaissance tradition" (*Rabelais* 52), while Clayborough's study of the grotesque includes an entire chapter on Dickens, alongside chapters on Jonathan Swift and Samuel Coleridge. A simple MLA Index search of "Dickens and Grotesque" produces 37 results, with titles such as "The

speaking, either the concrete, physical, urban centre, or its textual representations, but – in a way – both: it is "the … [city] itself, not simply [its] representation[s]" in various texts, yet "rhetoric, textual strategies, writing, staging, semiotics – all these are really at stake, but in a new form that has a simultaneous impact on the nature of things and on the social context, while it is not reducible to the one or the other" (Latour 5). This city of London was, beginning in the late 1970s, a site of significant and particularly modern political turbulence:

> [A]s Ray Porter has wryly observed in his acerbic attack on [Margaret] Thatcher's abuse of London: "as Mrs. Thatcher believed that there was no such thing as society, only individuals and families, it was … logical to deny that there was any such thing as London." So London was the site of Thatcherite abuse, an attempt to destroy the identity

---

Grotesque and Urban Chaos in *Bleak House,*" "Urban Perspectives: Fantasy and Reality in Hoffmann and Dickens," "Dickens and Kafka: 'The Technique of the Grotesque,'" and "Dickens and the Grotesque."

In the last several decades, a number of authors have utilised explicitly grotesque imagery to describe the city. In the third volume of *Writing London*, Julian Wolfreys writes, in the introduction entitled "London disfigured": "Who indeed can fathom the depths of London? Any such attempt could well be dangerous…. [T]he body and the psyche of the London subject are both comically and seriously rewritten by the city in Geoff Nicholson's *Bleeding London*, when Judy Tanaka tells her therapist: 'I display signs of both renewal and decay. Strange sensations commute across my skin. There is vice and crime and migration. My veins throb as though with the passage of underground trains. My digestive tract is sometimes clogged. There are security alerts. There's congestion and bottlenecks. Some of me is common, some of me is restricted. I have flats and high-rises. It doesn't need a genius to see what's going on. Greater London, *c'est moi*'" (3 – 4).

Inverting the metaphor taken up by Wolfreys (via Nicholson), Peter Ackroyd opens his mammoth biography of London with a chapter entitled "The city as body," in which he notes: "The image of London as a human body is striking and singular. … It is fleshy and voracious, grown fat upon its appetite for people and for food, for goods and for drink; it consumes and it excretes, maintained within a continual state of greed and desire. … That is why it has commonly been portrayed in monstrous form, a swollen and dropsical giant which kills more than it breeds. Its head is too large, out of proportion to the other members; its face and hands have also grown monstrous, irregular and 'out of all Shape.' … London is a labyrinth, half of stone and half of flesh" (1 – 2).

> of the city – yet paradoxically it can also be perceived as the site of her hegemonic nationalism. It was the split between using the capital's history as part of a mythic national ideology, and its simultaneous destruction at the hands of government policy, that created the space in which writers like [Iain] Sinclair [and, I would add, probably to Alex Murray's chagrin, Peter Ackroyd and Alan Moore] could use a site-specific form of critique to undermine the entire Thatcherite project. (Murray 65 – 66)

Simultaneously devalued in relation to Thatcher's government's promotion of a (Reaganite) free-market individualism and prized as the centre of "the rise of a [British] heritage industry" that was "the product of a conservative backlash against the accelerated modernization that followed the Second World War" (Murray 153), London of the 1980s and early 1990s became an ideal space of/for critique. This critique originated in/from a (grotesque) *parallax gap* opened up by a fidelity to the mid- to late-1970s *event* known as punk, the resulting multiplication of often contradictory *narratives* about London and of everyday and extraordinary *practices* of its inhabitants, and consequently by a multiplication of London itself.

These narratives and practices were, as we will see, made possible by punk, and the (grotesque) parallax gap they created designated "the inherent 'tension,' gap, noncoincidence, of the One" with itself (Žižek, *The Parallax View* 7): in this case, the noncoincidence of the city of London with itself. As this chapter will therefore try to show, the parallax gap's revelation from the multiplication of London as both a narrative and an actual urban space is, like the overcoming of the organism explored in the previous chapters, directly related to the use of grotesque deformation of the human body and, in this case, its ritualistic merging with the brick and mortar of the city. The elaboration of this urban parallax gap can thus show it to be another instance and a variation of the corporeal-ontological-MULTIPLICITY triad, in which form persists

while continually mutating. In this case, however, the grotesque functions by opening up the human body to the spaces and structures that this body inhabits and through conceptualising this space itself as a kind of organism. Through an elaboration of narrative spaces as acts of fidelity to the practices made possible by punk, texts of artists such as Ackroyd, Moore, and Sinclair reveal London-in-itself as a space whose description is made possible by the "absolute incommensurability of the resultant descriptions or theories of the object" that can be described as in-itself "but only indirectly, by way of a triangulation based on the incommensurability of the observations" (Jameson, "First Impressions").

While the Thatcherite socio-political project rested on efforts to rationalise this parallax gap – to write it out of existence via the mythological legacy of Victorianism[2] which aligned

[2] As Neil McCaw notes, this Thatcherite vision of Victorianism rested on the "rhetoric of moral and political order" equated with "the Victorian past." McCaw quotes Thatcher as saying: "'[T]hose were the values when our country became great, but not only did our country become great internationally, also so much advance was made in this country.' Thatcher lauded 'a great reforming age, whose zeal we should do well to emulate in terms of our own age and its needs,' a quasi-hagiography of the Victorian era and its 'urbanization of society … expansion of wealth and knowledge … transformative power of technology' that was part of a broader ideology that identified the nineteenth century as 'much more like ours than like the societies that had gone before'" (26).

In an interview for London Weekend Television's *Weekend World* with Brian Walden, Thatcher elaborated on this notion:

"**Brian Walden:** …What sort of Britain do you eventually want? … Am I wrong when I say that what you seem to be looking for is a more self-reliant Britain, a thriftier Britain, a Britain where people are freer to act, where they get less assistance from the State, where they're less burdened by the State, is that the sort of Britain that you want to bring about at the end of your Premiership?

"**Margaret Thatcher:** Yes, very much so. And where people are more independent of the State. I think we went through a period when too many people began to expect their standard of living to be guaranteed by the State, and so great protest movements came that you could, by having sufficient protests, sufficient demonstrations against Government, get somehow a larger share for yourself, and they looked to the protest and the demonstrations and the strikes to get a bigger share for them, but it always had to come from the people who really strived to do more and to do better.

individual self-reliance with Britain's past greatness, a greatness most concentrated "in visions of London as the focal point of Victorian culture" (Murray 64) – the critical projects of artists such as Ackroyd, Moore, and Sinclair rested on an embrace of this gap and an elaboration of its logic[3] via the aesthetics and ontology of the grotesque. The two – the Thatcherite socio-political project and its critique by authors such as Ackroyd, Moore, and Sinclair – are therefore closely linked. Not only do they struggle over the meaning of London, they commonly do so via an exploration of the city's Victorian 'origins,' by trying to posit them retroactively or (re)inscribe

---

"**Brian Walden:** All right, now you know, when you say you agree with those values, those values don't so much have a future resonance, there's nothing terribly new about them. They have a resonance of our past. Now obviously Britain is a very different country from the one it was in Victorian times when there was great poverty, great wealth, etc., but you've really outlined an approval of what I would call Victorian values. The sort of values, if you like, that helped to build the country throughout the 19th Century. Now is that right?

"**Margaret Thatcher:** Oh exactly. Very much so. Those were the values when our country became great, but not only did our country become great internationally, also so much advance was made in this country. Colossal advance, as people prospered themselves so they gave great voluntary things to the State. So many of the schools we replace now were voluntary schools, so many of the hospitals we replace were hospitals given by this great benefaction feeling that we have in Britain, even some of the prisons, the Town Halls. As our people prospered, so they used their independence and initiative to prosper others, not compulsion by the State. Yes, I want to see one nation, as you go back to Victorian times, but I want everyone to have their own personal property stake. Property, every single one in this country, that's why we go so hard for owner-occupation, this is where we're going to get one nation. I want them to have their own savings which retain their value, so they can pass things onto their children, so you get again a people, everyone strong and independent of Government, as well as a fundamental safety net below which no-one can fall. Winston [Churchill] put it best: You want a ladder, upwards, anyone, no matter what their background, can climb, but a fundamental safety net below which no-one can fall. That's the British character" ("TV Interview").

[3] This is, of course, not to say that London's parallax nature was created *ex nihilo* by Margaret Thatcher's socio-political strategies. Thatcher's politics did, however, have a large role in bringing it out into the open, and revealing its role in political discourse. The kind of parallax gap as elaborated in this chapter has, as we will see, very much to do with a contemporary/modern urban experience.

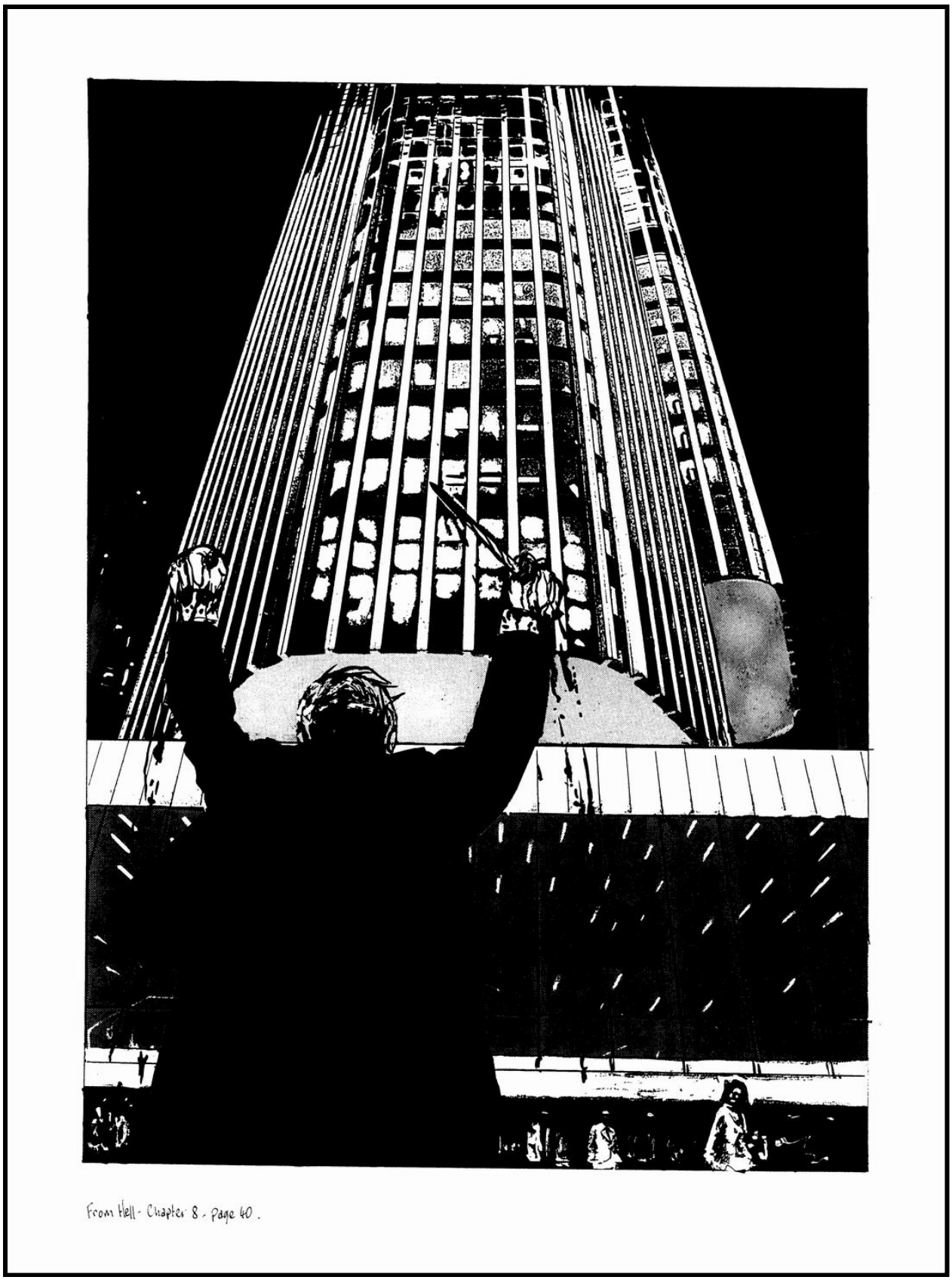


Figure 1: Gulls and Skyscrapers

them as presuppositions of the contemporary metropolis: this struggle is a struggle over a historical constellation in the service of the present moment. (While Thatcherism tries to reduce this narrative of origin to the vision of society-as-One, the critical projects of Ackroyd, Moore, Sinclair, and others try to preserve the multiplicity-within-One, most directly through the aesthetics of the grotesque.) It is, therefore, no accident that the central figure of Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's *From Hell* (published in serial form between 1989 and 1999) and Iain Sinclair's *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings* (*WCST*, 1987) is Jack the Ripper, one of "the two foremost symbols of the Victorian age" (Coville and Luciano 109), the other of which is Sherlock Holmes, who also plays a prominent role in Sinclair's narrative and is implicitly present in the works of Ackroyd and Moore, whose below-discussed texts can be classified as works of (metaphysical) detective fiction. Nor is it an accident that the murders which are the focus of Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor* (1985) and *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* (1994) – the latter of which is set in London in the last decades of the 19th century – clearly evoke the Jack the Ripper murders through their location in the city's East End and through these murders' apparently ritualistic yet mysterious nature, even if they are not directly attributed to the figure of Jack the Ripper.

Maggie, Punk, and the English Carnival

In a series of interviews with Kevin Jackson published in 2002 as *The Verbals* Iain Sinclair explicitly comments on the interrelatedness between Thatcher's socio-political project and that of London's (and, by extension, United Kingdom's) artists:

> London writers or visionaries of whatever stripe have to counter the main political culture. Because Thatcher introduced occultism into British political life. … She wanted to

> physically remake, she wanted to destroy the power of London, the mob, all of those things, which finally through the Poll Tax riots [of 1990] brought her down. I can't look at it in any other way but as actual demonic possession. She opened herself up to the darkest demons of world politics, and therefore writers were obliged to counter this by equally extraordinary projects. (qtd. in Murray 10)

These extraordinary projects, some of which I will describe below, were indeed generally galvanized by the figure and image of Thatcher and by her government's concrete political approach to, among other things[4], arts and culture.

During the years of her government, notes Sarfraz Manzoor highlighting the main thrust of this approach, "funding to key arts organisations was dramatically cut," and Richard Luce, the

---

[4] Many political commentators point out that public spending actually rose under Thatcher (see, for example, "How public spending rose under Thatcher" by George Eaton). Nevertheless, funding cuts to public service were deep. In his article, "We are still saving British science from Margaret Thatcher," Denis Noble, for example, writes of cuts to funding for scientific research: "The Thatcher government did not reach out, even to many of its natural sympathizers. *Save British Science*, for example, included people of different political persuasions, but we all shared a deep sense of despair at the decline of the UK economy and the threat to its extraordinarily successful scientific tradition. Even Andrew Huxley, the notoriously cautious president of the Royal Society, described the situation as 'alarming' in his 1984 anniversary address; a few days later, James Gowans, secretary of the UK Medical Research Council, described a 25% cut to project grants as 'draconian.' The government's failure to engage with researchers was all the more puzzling given that Margaret Thatcher was not only the first woman in the United Kingdom to become prime minister, but also the first scientist."

Keith Barlow writes the following in relation to Thatcher's government's first budget: "In the first Budget of Mrs. Thatcher's new government on 12 June, 1979, for the financial year 1970/1980, public expenditure was to be cut by £1,500m with *cash limits* tightened to reduce public expenditure by a further £1,000m so as to reduce the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement…. Income tax rates were lowered, benefiting those on high incomes whilst VAT was almost doubled from 8% to 15% and there were also big increases in prescription charges, etc. Such measures, being enacted alongside the public expenditure cuts, meant that the costs of the 1970 Budget were to fall on those with low incomes. … Just one week after its first Budget, the Thatcher government started its step-by-step programme of the privatisation of publicly-owned firms and corporations together with the selling off of stakes the Government had in the private sector" (64).

Minister for the Arts during the second Thatcher administration, provided the rationale for this political direction by defending Thatcher's free-market policies, stating:

> [T]here are still too many in the arts world who have yet to be weaned away from the welfare state mentality – the attitude that the taxpayer owes them a living. Many have not yet accepted the challenge of developing plural sources of funding. They give the impression of thinking that all other sources of fund are either tainted or too difficult to get. They appear not to have grasped that the collectivist mentality of the sixties and seventies is out of date. … [B]eyond the arts world is the mass of the British public. The majority tend to be highly sceptical about the use of taxpayers' money for the arts. (qtd. in Kawashima 30)

As we can see from this ideological stance, the Thatcherite vision of society imagines the self-determining individual (the taxpayer) as both separate from society and as, at the same time, the foundation of it. Society is here acommunal: as Thatcher argued, there are only "individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people [must] look to themselves first ("Interview"). Society is here One, and it is made up of free-standing ones: organisms whose shared ideological features (socio-political and economic situatedness which is imagined as natural, as a social fact, and as a harkening-back to a utopian past in a historicist move described by Benjamin) most often guarantee, in the presently discussed context, that these (multiple) ones are working toward a common goal.

The importance given to the shared ideological features of these organisms also guarantees that those who are differently situated are often perceived as somehow out of step with reality as such, and as endangering the coherence and unity of the societal One: they therefore take the role of the taxpayers' enemy or, in the words of Stuart Hall, they become "well

designed folk-devil[s]" (15). More often than not, these folk-devils were in the presently discussed context members of "UK's flourishing Afro-Caribbean communities, its burgeoning but oppressed gay subculture, ever-increasing swathes of the unemployed and any post-'60s holdout of bohemian liberalism" (Bell). As Dorian Lynskey writes, "Thatcher's infamous description of Arthur Scargill's [striking] miners as 'the enemy within' (the Argentinian dictator General Galtieri being the enemy without) spoke volumes about her need for foes."

In 1979, the year Thatcher was elected Prime Minister, Stuart Hall coined the term "authoritarian populism" (15) to delineate succinctly "Thatcherism's fractured, inconsistent but nonetheless powerful mobilisation of authoritarian and disciplinary discourses in conjunction with populist appeals to the individual consumer-voter and self-sustaining family" (Nunn 20) which were – and continue to be – the backbone of this free-market ideology. Hall writes,

> [I]n the doctrines and discourses of "social market values" – the restoration of competition and personal responsibility for effort and reward, the image of the over-taxed individual, enervated by welfare coddling, his initiative sapped by handouts by the state – "Thatcherism" has found a powerful means of popularizing the principles of a Monetarist philosophy: and in the image of the welfare "scavenger" a well designed folk-devil. The elaboration of this populist doctrine … represents the critical ideological work of constructing for "Thatcherism" a populist common sense. It is a particularly rich mix because of the resonant traditional themes – nation, family, duty, authority, standards, self-reliance – which have been effectively condensed into it. Here elements from many traditional ideologies … have been inserted into and woven together to make a set of discourses which are then harnessed to the practices of the radical Right and the class forces they now aspire to represent. (17)

These multiple, often disparate, discourses were given a unity or "common sense" through three interconnected mechanisms: a) the mythic narrative (fantasy) of Victorianism that was seen as embodying this utopian confluence of qualities and as a time lost but finally retrievable, exemplifying the values from which, according to Thatcher, "our country became great" (qtd. in McCaw 26); b) the elaboration of the common-man's (taxpayer's, individual's) enemy: Hall's well designed folk-devil, which was the most direct way Thatcher "opened herself up to the darkest demons of world politics" (Sinclair, qtd. in Murray 10) as it was ultimately this folk-devil which came to haunt her; and c) the socio-political and economic practices of Thatcherism.

As Jacqueline Rose notes, Thatcherism is here "both a fantasy and a real event" (23). Leaving aside Rose's psychoanalytic framework, we can concur with her that fantasy is, as a concept,

> inadequate for dealing with the specific force of right-wing ideologies at that point where they harness fantasy to reason…. If we want to think about the place of fantasy in public life today, we need … to avoid or qualify two conceptions: the one that describes fantasy as [solely] a projection of individual self-interest (the 'rational' reasons…); but equally the one that sees fantasy as an unbridled irrationalism without any logic, a conception which turns fantasy into a simple counter-image of the law. (20)

In other words, Thatcherism can be seen as a confluence of mythical narratives rooted in a Victorianism (what Rose calls "fantasy") whose disjunctures are erased/rationalized through the creation of an enemy, a folk-demon, and through legitimization of violence as a natural/ rationally deployed tool of "the authority of the state" (Rose 15)[5] directed at the above-mentioned enemy. Leaving the actual political practices – which admittedly played a large part

[5] For a further discussion of the link between rationality and violence in Thatcherism, see Rose 15ff.

Figure 2: Maggie Regina (1983) by Peter Kennard

in this process – of Thatcher's government aside, Thatcherism's rationalisation of the parallax gap, as this chapter aims to show via analyses of texts of Ackroyd, Moore, and Sinclair, operates therefore via the image of Margaret Thatcher, "a woman who stands for a super-rationality [that] writes violence into the law" (Rose 15). Significantly, Rose calls this image a basis of a "grotesque scenario" (15). Before I describe how this rationalisation works in relation to the above-mentioned authors' texts allow me to delineate briefly the grotesque-carnivalesque realm of extraordinary projects that forms these works' context and that emerges as a consequence of newly created subjects' fidelity to punk.

Recently, on the occasion of Margaret Thatcher's death, when, "fuelled by an online campaign organised by opponents of the former prime minster" (Turner), the song "Ding Dong! The Witch is Dead" was propelled to number two on the UK Charts, and when "the phrase 'death parties' enter[ed] the common parlance" as "spontaneous celebrations broke out on the streets of several British cities … living up to the promise of the Liverpool football chant: *'We're*

going to have a party when Margaret Thatcher dies'" (Bell)[6], the British comedian Russell Brand eloquently summarized the feelings of a significant number of Britons:

> I see her in her hairy helmet, condescending on Nationwide, eviscerating eunuch MPs and baffled BBC fuddy duddies with her General Zodd stare and coldly condemning the IRA. And the miners. And the single mums. The dockers. The poll-tax rioters. The Brixton rioters, the Argentinians, teachers; everyone actually. Thinking about it now, when I was a child she was just a strict woman telling everyone off and selling everything off. … Perhaps my early apathy and indifference are a result of what Thatcher deliberately engendered, the idea that "there is no such thing as society," that we are alone on our journey through life, solitary atoms of consciousness. Or perhaps it was just because I was a little kid and more interested in them Weetabix skinheads, Roland Rat and Knight Rider. Either way, I'm an adult now and none of those things are on telly any more so there's no excuse for apathy.

A significant part of the arts community in England, particularly in its urban centres, shared this view of Thatcher while she was in power and after her departure from politics: they – along with the IRA, the miners, the single mums and the teachers – belonged to the folk-demons she had created. These folk-demons are the figures that populate and give energy to the works of artists who developed various critical extraordinary projects; they are also, as we will soon see, the figures that populate the works of Sinclair, Ackroyd, and Moore.

---

[6] See, for example this report from UK's daily newspaper, *The Independent*, written by Brian Brady and titled "They gave a Margaret Thatcher death party – but not many came": http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/special-report-they-gave-a-margaret-thatcher-death-party--but-not-many-came-8572221.html

Micheal Billington, the drama critic for *The Guardian* since 1971, reminds us that within the context of a number of realms of culture under Thatcher, such as theatre, "it would be silly to get starry-eyed about the 80s or take a revisionist historical line" as the "cultural tone was set by the arts minister … Luce" while many artists "did vital work without radically changing the [cultural] landscape" ("Margaret Thatcher"). Steve Punt, one of the writers of the anti-Thatcher satiric television puppet show *Spitting Image*, which ran from 1984 until 1996, similarly notes:

> The one thing I always feel is ironic about *Spitting Image* is that it used to be made in a studio in a building right in the middle of Docklands; and eventually *Spitting Image* had to move out and they knocked the whole place down and they built this huge glittering monument to capitalism right on top of where *Spitting Image* raged against the establishment. And it always somehow feels to me like it's, sort of … putting satire in its place. ("Spitting Image")

Nevertheless, it is simultaneously impossible to deny the galvanizing influence of Thatcher in the realms of drama, television, literature, and music through the 1980s and early 1990s, when, according to Hanif Kureishi, despite her "disastrous" long-term effect, "there were many sparky cultural critiques of … Thatcher" produced by attacks on her "basic[ ] vulgar[ity]," lack of "cultural sophistication or understanding," and hatred of culture driven by her recognition that art is "a form of dissent" ("Margaret Thatcher").

This dissent was palpably present in the British arts of the 1980s and early 1990s, arts that can be seen as embodying a fidelity (in Badiou's sense of the term) to the event of punk, a cultural phenomenon which, in the face of a consolidating parliamentary-capitalist (or democratic-materialist) consensus, briefly but powerfully "denied all social facts, and in that denial affirmed that everything was possible" (Marcus 2). As Greil Marcus further notes, punk

was via this negation/affirmation directly linked to cultural movements such as Dada and the Lettrist and Situationist Internationals and their carnivalisation of everyday life (381), their attempts to reject "alienated labor" and affirm life as "a festival, a game, a real presence of real people and real time" (Debord, qtd. in Marcus 400). The London art investigated in this chapter can therefore be seen as "trying to hold onto … [the punk event] as it vanishe[s]" as a consequence of its ephemeral nature and with the onslaught of Thatcherism (Marcus 77). As "a moment in time that took shape as a language anticipating its own destruction" and "a chance to create ephemeral events that would serve as judgments on whatever came next" (77), punk was short-lived yet perfectly situated to provide a place – a place where "nothing will have taken place but [this very] place[7]" (Mallarmé, qtd. in Badiou, *Being and Event* 196) – to which critical work of the 1980s and early 1990s could stay faithful and which it could use "to judge all that followed [as] wanting" (Marcus 77). As we will see, these judgements were, in punk and after, closely aligned with the carnivalesque and the grotesque aesthetic form that imbue it.

As Peter Kennard's "Maggie Regina" [Figure 2] displays by aligning Thatcher's image with that of Queen Victoria – the monarch of the United Kingdom, the Empress of India, and the Defender of the Faith and Supreme Governor of the Church of England – Thatcher in many ways embodied in the popular progressive imagination the official culture of high seriousness: her "professed cultural tastes were deeply conservative" (Manzoor) and in the realm of popular entertainment (which can, according to this perspective, be termed art and culture only loosely, if at all) the "role model, much admired by Thatcher, was the commercial musical," which was "popular, profitable, capable of generating international franchises and, above all, conservative in outlook" (Billington, qtd. in "Margaret Thatcher"). As in Bakhtin's dual (Rabelaisian/USSR)

[7] See Chapter 1, 102ff.

context, this politically and socially conservative outlook on culture "sanction[s] the existing pattern of things and reinforce[s] it" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 9). Within this pattern, past is used "to consecrate the present" and to actively produce it. It "assert[s] all that [is or is presented as] stable, unchanging, perennial: the existing hierarchy, the existing religious, political, and moral values, norms, and prohibitions. It [is] the triumph of a truth already established" – a truth that is in this case a combination of mythic narratives and concrete political practices – "the predominant truth that [is] put forward as eternal and indisputable. This is why the tone of the official feast [is] monolithically serious and why the element of laughter [is] alien to it" (9).

Even though this is not necessarily so – comedy and laughter can be and often are conservative or reactionary – the 1980s and early 1990s British arts and culture in the aftermath of punk produced and maintained a space in many ways similar to the one Bakhtin celebrates in his discussion of Rabelais. While in many ways darker and more desperate than the culture of laughter Bakhtin describes, the art and culture that "rose against Thatcher" (Bell) embodied the grotesque-carnivalesque energies in often-explicit ways. Grotesque satire, for example, is a prominent way this carnivalesque ethos was expressed. "Comedians have often pointed out," writes Sean Bell, "that the very worst politicians provide the very best material for satire," and

> Thatcher may be the ultimate proof of this. The bitter surreality of British 'alternative comedy' emerged almost entirely in reaction to her, launching the careers of figures like Alexi Sayle and Ben Elton. Rik Mayall … spent most of his early career personifying the comic grotesques left in Thatcherism's wake, such as … Alan B'Stard, a degenerate parody of the corrupt, icy political operators who rode Thatcher's coattails to power.

One of the most explicitly grotesque depictions of Thatcher(ism) (and according to Bell, its "most memorable and blisteringly effective caricature") through the mid 1980s and into the 90s

came from the above-mentioned satirical puppet show *Spitting Image* which, according to Charles Denton, the Director of Programmes at Central TV which aired the show, inserted "a little bit of healthy political disrespect and perhaps a bit of anarchy in the weekend [television] schedule" ("Spitting Image").

Figure 3: *Spitting Image*'s Maggie

Turning 10 Downing Street and the Royal family into a soap opera, *Spitting Image* was a TV show literally populated by grotesque puppets, the most prominent of which was Thatcher, the show's "leading lady[8]" ("Spitting Image"). *Spitting Image*'s portrayal of Thatcher as "a dead-eyed tyrant who ruled her cabinet by intimidation and violence" (Bell) was stressed through the visual qualities of her puppet [Figure 3][9], a "grotesque, life-size, latex" thing characterized by "an increasingly aggressive demeanor" within "settings that were ever more macabre":

> [T]owards the end of her time in office, this led to her being depicted as a mad butcher engaged in slaughtering with a cleaver the queues of jobless at her (Job Centre) office

[8] Roger Law, one of the show's creators (Peter Fluck and Roger Law were the show's puppet-creators), credited "John Lloyd, who co-produced *Spitting Image*, with making the program feasible: 'John shrewdly sugared the pill. We wanted half an hour of heavy satire – "I hate Thatcher, I hate Thatcher, I hate Thatcher" – which you can't do on mainstream television. John knew what you could get away with'" (Carpenter 329).

[9] The above image is taken from http://www.news.com.au/world-news/margaret-thatcher-the-pop-culture-icon/story-fndir2ev-1226615674565

> door. In this way, selected properties of individual puppets were made to stand as comments on the personalities of the figures they depicted, and in some cases on their activities in public life. (Meinhof and Smith 45)

Through this kind of depiction, and the show's intertextual connections with "a tradition of British political satire exemplified by the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century painters and draughtsmen" such as William Hogarth (Meinhof and Smith 47), *Spitting Image*'s take on Thatcher and politicians in general is directly linked to the grotesque tradition of caricature.

As Justin D. Edwards and Rune Graulund write in their study of the grotesque, Hogarth "used caricature to inspire laughter by exposing hypocrisy, desire, greed, lust, and gluttonous appetites associated with grotesque bodies … often ridicul[ing] the ruling elite" (101). This use of grotesque caricature reveals laughter as an emotive response while also stressing its historical dimension, a dimension that speaks to "the cultural politics of laughter" as a "response associated with the popular energies of the carnival" that "deflates official seriousness and exposes social artifice" (104). Now, as Steve Punt notes, this laughter was in the long run, in the context of Thatcherism, smothered by forces symbolized by the gentrification of London's Docklands[10], whose Canary Wharf district has become "a dense, tall, steel and glass cathedral to

[10] London Docklands Development Corporation was "an urban regeneration body established by the government in 1981 to oversee the redevelopment of disused docks and neighbouring sites…. Using its powers of compulsory purchase, the LDDC acquired and resold 1,066 acres (431 hectares) of land and sponsored the construction of the Docklands Light Railway and other infrastructural improvements, spending almost £2 billion in the process. *Depending on the radically contrasting viewpoints of various interested parties, the LDDC was either the saviour of a blighted wasteland or the destroyer of long-established working-class communities*" ("London Docklands Development Corporation," emphasis added).

Stan Hawkins and Sarah Niblock describe the Docklands as follows: "The ebbs and flows of dockland development symbolize London's continued attempts to be a global leader in trade. While Liverpool's port greets all who enter with architectural magnificence, London's eastern-most waterside landscape is notable

capitalism which was so vaunted by Britain's neo-Conservative government in the mid 1980s that the central pyramid-topped tower is colloquially titled 'Thatcher's Dick'" (Hawkins and Niblock 156). And yet the glimmer of carnivalesque jollity remains and is worth recouping; as Roger Law, one of the creators of *Spitting Image*, notes: "I don't believe satire changes anything, though you think it will when you're young. But on *Spitting Image* in the Thatcher days, we sometimes had the feeling we were the only effective opposition. At least we were airing the issues; the Labour Party wasn't. They were fucking useless" (qtd. in Carpenter 329 – 330).

In the theatre, "left-wing dramatists … such as Howard Brenton, David Hare, Edward Bond, David Edgar, and Caryl Churchill" faced the challenge of finding "a theatrical discourse capable of effectively portraying [the] critique [of the Thatcherite ideology] and engaging an audience that was becoming increasingly unsympathetic to socialist politics" (Peacock 65). In many ways prefiguring the work of Sarah Kane, this kind of political theatre often utilised the grotesque-carnivalesque aesthetic to communicate with its audiences. As Peacock writes: "In June 1980, almost a year after … Thatcher came to power, Howard Brenton and Tony Howard launched the left-wing theatre's first offensive against Thatcherism with *A Short Sharp Shock*," a

---

more for utility and versatility rather than cultural aspiration. Nonetheless, traveling to the O2 by any means of transport – river, road or rail – brings the commuter into close contact with Canary Wharf district, a dense, tall, steel and glass cathedral to capitalism which was so vaunted by Britain's neo-Conservative government in the mid 1980s that the central pyramid-topped tower is colloquially titled 'Thatcher's Dick'" (156).

Iain Sinclair, in his *Lights out for the Territory*, describes Canary Wharf as "[t]he towers of Manhattan rising out of the swampland. Unlimited, on-line credit. A city of electricity. A giant slot machine with clouds in every window. An *inverted* centre. A conceptual city. A centre that could be anywhere and nowhere. The definitive repudiation of the discredited philosophy of place. Canary Wharf had the vulgarity to climb off the drawing-board. Claes Odenburg's giant lipsticks were jokes that knew how to behave: they were never intended for the landscape of London. They stayed where they belonged, in the notebook, on the gallery wall. You were free to imagine them, you didn't have to suffer them every day of your life: like that blunt acupuncture needle, that dissatisfied glass erection" (227).

play whose "grotesquely surrealistic representation[s] … prefigure[ ] the satirical puppetry of 1980s television's *Spitting Image*" (68). Similarly, Steven Berkoff's *Sink the Belgrano* (1986) attacks Thatcherism via "gross caricature," representing Thatcher and her War Cabinet as "puppets straight from 'Spitting Image'" (Prunet 93). As Monique Prunet continues,

> Their names are irreverentially distorted as shown by the most obvious examples: Margaret Thatcher into Maggot Scratcher; Pym (Foreign Secretary) into Pimp, Nott (Defence Minister) into Nit…. As for President Reagan, he is referred to as "Old Cowboy," "Old Geriatric Joe" (13), or "Cowboy Joe" (30). The language used by Cabinet members, the Opposition, Naval Command and sailors alike is deliberately strewn with four-letter words, a language which would appear more adequate in the mouths of drunk football hooligans than on the lips of Her Majesty's government members. (93)

Nicole Boireau, elaborating on this representational strategy, writes: "Turning everything upside down, carnivalizing ordinary reality to better confront patterns of moral oppression, is Berkoff's strategy for creating electrifying theatrical events. Exterior … and inner forces combine to shape a baroque universe which he explores with tingling theatricality" (81). The ethos of punk – delight in negation, disrespect toward authority – is here on full display.

Similarly, David Edgar's plays consistently "address the most basic question of how humans organize and govern themselves in modern societies" (Reinelt and Hewitt 2) while considering the carnivalesque to be "the best performance discourse to offer an oppositional form appropriate to the … [contemporary] political climate" (Peacock 113). Writing of the carnivalesque in an article entitled "Festivals of the Oppressed," Edgar cites his own play *That Summer* (1986) – whose title "refers to the summer of 1984, the year of the miners' strike" which

"for many Conservative thinkers … marked the occasion when … Thatcher's government finally destroyed the unions once and for all" (Rev. of *That Summer*) – as an example of what "most of us [playwrights] are striving for":

> [A] way of combining the cerebral, unearthly detachment of Brecht's theory with the all too earthy, sensual, visceral experience of Bakhtin's carnival, so that in alliance these two forces can finally defeat the puppeteers and manipulators of the spectacle. We are doing so in full knowledge of the dangers of incorporation, of becoming no more than a radical side-show to divert the masses and dampen their ardour. But, although Terry Eagleton is right to remind us of Shakespeare's perception that "there is no slander in an allowed fool," there remain fools, in the bard's canon and elsewhere, whose message of energy and anarchy is by no means welcome at the feast, and would be even less so if informed by the passion and intelligence of those whose analysis of social wrongs is informed by a greater breadth of experience and thought. (31)

Again, energy and anarchy, and the idea of the dangerous fool, bespeak the echoes of punk in this focus on the carnivalesque. Importantly, as Keith D. Peacock notes, Edgar was only one of a number of progressive dramatists who "consider[ed] the carnivalesque as a solution to the quest for a new left-wing discourse" in Thatcher's Britain (113).

I would here like to suggest that, as with the case of *Spitting Image*, these dramatists found in the carnivalesque-grotesque aesthetic mode a suitable discourse because of the creeping realization that *Thatcher's world is our world*. In contradistinction to Thatcher's notion of society as One collection of ones which tries to carefully delineate its enemy as somehow different, the carnivalesque-grotesque aesthetic allowed/allows for an expression of an ambiguous world-view which recognizes that, as Ralf Remshardt notes, "[c]arnival and the

saturnalian modes of literature and art align themselves with performance not only because performance is a steady component of carnival nor because both are equally subversive and transgressive within the boundaries of the permissible but also because they emphasize and indeed exhume, in their own (laughing) ambiguity, a culture's ambiguities about itself" (43). As such, carnivalesque-grotesque laughter evoked within the British carnival is thoroughly ambiguous:

> Kristeva, correctively glossing Bakhtin, speaks of carnival laughter as "no more comic than tragic; it is both at once, one might say that it is *serious*." … The key is perhaps that grotesque laughter is not the laughter of humor; it is always inappropriate laughter, and therefore it both does and does not belong to the grotesque. One is, in other words, simultaneously in sympathy and out of sympathy with the grotesque; this is an essential part of its aesthetic definition. (Remshardt 81 – 82)

The grotesque-carnivalesque aesthetic, therefore, allowed/allows the politically progressive artist to point to the enemy *qua* enemy and to simultaneously recognize that the enemy is not "they" but, rather, "we." – Echoes, again, of punk: "'The punk stance,' Lester Bangs wrote in 1979, is 'riddled with self-hate, which is always reflexive'" (Marcus 75); "There was a time in London in 1977 when Jack the Ripper was the ultimate punk, and everything from thuggery to death camps was part of the moment" (75). After 1979, however, Thatcherism became the focus of this ambiguity, sapping it somewhat but not entirely of the force of its delight in negation while giving it a more concrete political *raison d'être*.

On the music scene, through the 1980s and early 1990s, this grim carnival came in many forms and it was almost always in some way "an outgrowth of punk" (Nehring 5), that music-event which "insisted on living in a hyper-intensive present" (Savage xi). As a cultural entity,

punk, which thrived briefly in the mid to late 1970s, was a truly Badiouian event: it first went unrecognised as a cultural *place* and then, as John Savage points out, as it created and multiplied new subjectivities (punks), it was "actively discouraged if not banned … first by the music industry, then the newspapers and the politicians, then the public at large" (xv). As subjects of punk, punks perceived its import and practised fidelity to its truth: punk's being discouraged if not banned

> resulted in an underground distribution and production network which turned necessity into a virtue: it was easy and cheap, go do it. These ideals of access – [recently] … expanded by the internet – have become one of Punk's enduring legacies. The Sex Pistols had sung 'no future' with such force that it seemed like a curse: doing it all yourself – making, producing and releasing your own record/fanzine/ book/film… – and federating with other like minds became the hidden positive to Punk's much flaunted negative, a practical decentralisation with infinite possibilities. (xv)

Punk's grim carnival was a negation practiced within the realm of popular culture. At first, "the official pop space was closed to most of [it]" and this allowed punk to "create its own space of freedom" (Marcus 71). As such, punk was quite literally a redistribution of the perceptible (or audible) explored in the first chapter: it drew on Guy Debord's insight that Spectacle is never simply "a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images" (142), in order to use a "sound [that] was irrational" – that "seemed to make no sense at all, to make nothing, only to destroy" – so as to make newly perceptible that which "countless people" in the 1970s "were now [suddenly] allowed to play and what they were now allowed to hear" (Marcus 61). As an event, punk quite literally revealed "all the elements of the site … that

subordinate[d] themselves, with maximal intensity, to that which was nothing and [now became] all" (*Logics of Worlds* 468): noise, ugliness, filth, irreverence.

Even though the "music business was not destroyed" and "[s]ociety did not fall, and a new world did not [ultimately] come into being" (Marcus 61), punks utilised the irrationality of their sound – and of their look, behaviour, and social practices – to "hurl[ ] themselves at social facts. The sense that a social fact could be addressed by a broken chord produced music that changed one's sense of what music could be, and thus changed one's sense of the social fact: it could be destroyed" (76). This irrational sound was not only paired with a grotesque visual aesthetic, it itself in many ways performed the work of the grotesque. Yes, the punks were ugly: a "ten-inch safety pin cutting through a lower lip;" "a fan forcing a finger down his throat, vomiting into his hands, then hurling the spew at the people on stage" thus "spreading disease;" an "inch thick nimbus black mascara suggested death before it suggested anything else" (69). They were "not just pretty people … who made themselves ugly" (69 – 70); they were also "fat, anorexic, pock-marked, acned, stuttering, crippled, scarred, and damaged," appearing finally as "human beings … parad[ing] their afflictions as social facts" (70): they *were* bodies de-formed. But the punk sound was also, in a way, grotesque: as the work of Tarantino and Kane assaults the organism by tinkering with and removing the signposts of individuality of personalities and bodies in favour of the grotesque body, so did punk sound appear "unnatural: speeded up past personality into anonymity, pinched, reduced, artificial" (76). Punk aimed to destroy the organism, its one-count, and replace it with who-knows-what.

As punk spent itself by mid-1979, the same year Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister, a new generation of artists tried to continue practicing a fidelity to its truth. The organisation and rationalisation of punk's delight in negation naturally blunted some of its

(practical) edges, yet it also gave it a new critical/theoretical edge, refusing to allow punk to fully exhaust itself in its delight in negation. Writing of Lacan, Žižek notes the importance of "the wager of Truth" practiced by Marxism and psychoanalysis, achieved not by "running after 'objective' truth, but by holding onto the truth about the position from which one speaks" (*In Defense* 3). The extraordinary projects of London (and UK) artists after punk did precisely this: they held onto the truth about the place that punk cleared, that punk opened up. Their critical works gave punk a theory, a theory defined as "the theory of a failed practice" (*In Defense* 3) that "confronts us with the problem of fidelity: how to redeem the emancipatory potential of these [practical] failures through avoiding the trap of nostalgic attachment to the past and of all-too-slick accommodation to 'new circumstances'" (3). Many of the critical works of UK's artists during the Thatcher era aimed to investigate the failure of punk and the rise of Thatcherism as two sides of a coin that purchased the world we lived and continue to live in.

Songs of dissent of artists such as The Clash, Billy Bragg, and Elvis Costello, therefore, showed that "rock music was hardly missing in action in the early years of Thatcher's tenure," and that it was as politically volatile as at any time before or since (Nehring 9). Billy Bragg, for example, stated: "Whenever I'm asked to name my greatest inspiration, I always answer 'Margaret Thatcher,' leaving interviewers to wonder if I'm being ironic. Truth is, before she came into my life, I was just your run-of-the-mill singer-songwriter" ("Margaret Thatcher"). Songs like "Margaret on the Guillotine" by Morrissey and Elvis Costello's "Tramp the Dirt Down" harnessed the oppositional punk ethos of the late 1970s, delivering a more focused critique of concrete political practices and of a concrete image (of Thatcher and Thatcherism) while tapping into the grim carnival space revealed by punk: "God save the Queen / The fascist regime," sang the breaking voice of Johnny Rotten to the unschooled musical chaos of The Sex

Pistols in 1977; in 1989, Elvis Costello raspily crooned to a folky tune: "There's one thing I know I'd like to live long enough to savour / That's when they finally put you in the ground / I'll stand on your grave and tramp the dirt down." Morrissey, in 1988, somewhat tiredly yet also strangely romantically sang: "The kind people / Have a wonderful dream / Margaret on the guillotine." These visions of celebration and death, recreated recently in the Thatcher death-parties, gleefully appropriate the "grotesque imagery" depicting the "crisis of change" as "the struggle of the old life stubbornly resisting the new life about to be born" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 50).

Figure 4: "The Dance of Death" (1493) by Michael Wolgemut

This *danse macabre* [Figure 4] reaches back as far as the tradition of "medieval and Renaissance grotesque" where it is most often pictured as "a more or less funny monstrosity" (51). As a recrudescence of this tradition, laughing at and mourning Margaret Thatcher's death is the consequence of the realization that her death is also our death, just as her life was our life. Russell Brand, again, eloquently expresses this insight:

> The blunt, pathetic reality today is that a little old lady has died, who in the winter of her life had to water roses alone under police supervision. If you behave like there's no such thing as society, in the end there isn't. Her death must be sad for the handful of people she was nice to and the rich people who got richer under her stewardship. It isn't sad for anyone else. There are pangs of nostalgia, yes, because for me she's all tied up with Hi-

> De-Hi and Speak and Spell and Blockbusters and "follow the bear." What is more troubling is my inability to ascertain where my own selfishness ends and her neo-liberal inculcation begins. All of us that grew up under Thatcher were taught that it is good to be selfish, that other people's pain is not your problem, that pain is in fact a weakness and suffering is deserved and shameful. Perhaps there is resentment because the clemency and respect … being mawkishly displayed now by some and haughtily demanded of the rest of us at the impending, solemn ceremonial funeral, are values that her government and policies sought to annihilate.

Thatcher and Thatcherism, argue Louisa Hadley and Elizabeth Ho echoing Brand's insight, "function as a symbolic 'wound' in the contemporary imagination," as her "cultural and political policies cut violently across institutions as diverse as industry, communication, and the arts, in controversial, often devastating ways" (2). "On the political level," they continue, Thatcher "represented a 'rupture'" and an "'irreversible break' … from the Keynesian economic structures of postwar Britain. Consolidating Conservative power and a populist base of support, Thatcher essentially dismantled the Labor Party, trade unionism, and the efficacy of dissent represented by the Left," which "did not really grasp the magnitude of the break … intended by Thatcherism" (2). At the same time, as Arthur Redding notes, the post-WWII state was not gone or shrunk; rather, its "immense and ever-expanding bureaucratic machinery has been put in the service of a hyper-accelerated, excessive, spuriously laissez fair real-estate boom, driven by neoliberal capitalism" (Message).

Rap, which is contemporary with neoliberalism of Thatcher and Reagan, testifies to this fact better than anything else. As Mark Fisher writes: "Both rap and neoliberalism are 30 years old: 1979, the year that Margaret Thatcher was elected, was also the year when the Sugarhill

Gang had the first bona fide hip-hop hit with 'Rapper's Delight.'" The early work of artists such as Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five and Public Enemy focused on: a) elaborating "vision[s] of [the reality that surrounded a large section of the black population in the UK and the USA, in the form of] collapsed infrastructure, apathy and dejection" perpetuated by neo-liberalist policies, and b) particularly in the case of Public Enemy, a militancy communicated through their "ballistic, information-dense use of sampling" as "a critical intervention into this 'reality'" (Fisher). The subsequent evolution of hip-hop, which often elaborated a world of "generalised betrayal, distrust and exploitation," became an "unintentional parody of neoliberal rapacity" as well as the dominant form of popular expression in music into today[11]. As the continued popularity of hip-hop suggests[12], then, in many ways we are still living through the legacies of Thatcher's (and Reagan's) policies. As Kureishi, almost certainly over-optimistically and somewhat non-historically, notes: today, "the enterprise culture that she so valued has finally exploded, bringing down with it the greedy bankers she so adored. It seems to me that at last

[11] While not, I would argue, an expression of a fidelity to Punk, even Rap displays a close connection to *negation*, tracing a path parallel to Punk. In the "prominent and lively arena of ideological articulation" it has elaborated (De Genova 89), Rap (particularly, as Nick De Genova notes, gangster rap) engages with the "violence of everyday life, the violence that causes poor urban neighbourhoods to resemble military zones" (94) in order to engage with nihilism as "a tremendous resource for African American cultural production" (95).

[12] There are signs, as Mark Fisher suggests, that hip-hop is today on the wane: "Last month," he writes, "the LA producers Sa-Ra Creative Partners released *Nuclear Evolution: the Age of Love*. It is not really a hip-hop record. Rap is just one element of Sa-Ra's sound, which, instead of hip-hop's habitual hyper-awake state of survivalist awareness, is bleary and dreamy and diffusely erotic. What seems to be returning here is the psychedelic utopianism that hip-hop rejected in order to demonstrate its realism. … With the bank crisis literally discrediting the neoliberal model of reality, and Barack Obama's election raising utopian hopes after the dark reign of George Bush, could it be that hip-hop's status as top dog in black popular music is finally coming to an end?"

we've probably come to the end of Thatcherism" ("Margaret Thatcher"). In the 1980s and early 1990s, however, during Thatcherism's undisputed hegemony, along with Morrissey and Elvis Costello a number of bands played songs that went into making what Daniel Trilling calls "the soundtrack to a decade of dissent." The Specials' "Ghost Town" (1981), The Jam's "Town Called Malice" (1982), Robert Wyatt's "Shipbuilding" (1982), The Enemy Within's "Strike" (1984), Billy Bragg's "Waiting for the Great Leap Forwards" (1988) and Kristy MacColl's "Free World" (1989) complete his Maggie's Playlist (Trilling).

Rave culture, which was often accused of being just a way of "escaping the dull, daily reality of living and working" (Kristian Russell, qtd. in Nehring 15), offered a different but equally relevant elaboration of the carnival and a fidelity to punk. Rather than focusing on the regenerative aspects of death, rave culture practiced "community and collective strength" through the "power [of] people being lovely to each other" (qtd. in Nehring 15). Through, in the first place, dance and drug-use, raves fostered "solidarity in a social-affective manner" which was "formed 'in the moment'" through "deeply powerful and meaningful experiences at dance events" (Kavanaugh and Anderson 199). Dancing has here replaced punk's more violent form of collective experience: moshing. These experiences were subsequently extended through "social interaction, friendships, the Internet, as well as personal and professional involvement in the scene" as means of "locat[ing] social-affective solidarity as a more sustained part of one's personal and social identity" (199), as a reconfiguration of one's everyday practices. Leaving aside the fact that drug use – as a kind of punk 'tarrying with the negative' – often contributed to an "erosion of solidarity" (199) created through raves, these cultural events approximated "Bakhtin's idea of carnival" (Nehring 15): the "social-affective solidarity" can here be seen as a

form of "repugnance at the ravages of Thatcherism … and certainly seems subversive in light of Thatcher's encouragement of selfishness" (15).

Rejecting the notion that we are alone on our journey through life as solitary atoms of consciousness, rave culture elaborated a contemporary practice of carnival, which extended from the space of dance to other multiform practices of everyday life via which we can directly see, once again, a legacy of punk:

> [S]ubcultural enterprises like those involved in rave culture – graphics, fashion design, retail, music production, publishing – were not a capitulation but … an "empowering experience." The idea of resistance ought to include seemingly mundane "choices about how to live" when they result in attempts to earn a living (and master new digital technologies…) "in a way which is frequently in opposition to those available, received or encouraged images or identities." Rather than avoidance and pure abandonment, politically speaking, rave culture, precisely in its commercial aspects, might be "better considered as angry ripostes to the rhetoric of Thatcher. If she said be enterprising then their enterprise was pursued in precisely those 'soft' art areas, unprofitable but personally rewarding, which have always found little favor with Conservatives." The scenes organized around every genre of music need to be regarded in a similar light, as offering non-conformist identities on a personal level, and by extension the possibility of "change and social transformation" more generally. (Nehring 16 – 17)

As in punk, the goal here is to transform "the breach in the pop milieu" into a breach in "the realm of everyday life" (Marcus 3) through which the political can be reimagined/reconstituted[13].

[13] Here is the entire quote from Greil Marcus's *Lipstick Traces*: "The Sex Pistols made a breach in the pop milieu, in the screen of received cultural assumptions governing what one expected to hear and how one expected to respond. Because received cultural assumptions are hegemonic propositions about the way the

Finally, a similar strategy can be seen in Rock Against Racism's[14] (RAR) "carnivals" (Morley, "Rock Against Racism") which, with RAR's founding in 1976 and its first concert in 1978, "supplied punk with at least one coherent agenda" (Nehring 7). As Neil Nehring continues, stressing their communal nature, these events

---

world is supposed to work – ideological constructs perceived and experienced as natural facts – the breach in the pop milieu opened into the realm of everyday life: the milieu where commuting to work, doing one's job in the home or the factory or the office or the mall, going to the movies, buying groceries, buying records, watching television, making love, having conversations, not having conversations, or making lists of what to do next, people actually lived. Judged according to its demands on the world, a Sex Pistols record had to change the way a given person performed his or her commute – which is to say that the record had to connect that act to every other, and then call the enterprise as a whole into question. Thus would the record change the world" (3).

[14] Rock Against Racism was a movement "set up in 1976 to combat the rise of the National Front in Britain through music. The Anti Nazi League, established in 1977, was a closely connected group that sought similar objectives through political organization.

"Glam rock musicians such as David Bowie and Siouxse Sioux had flirted with swastika imagery, and after Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech Eric Clapton spoke in support of the politician at a Birmingham concert. The photographer Red Saunders wrote a furious reply in the New Musical Express: 'Half your music is black. You're rock music's biggest colonist.' This triggered the Rock Against Racism movement.

"Saunders, along with Roger Huddle, David Widgery, and others, organized two carnivals in London in 1978. The first, on 30 April, saw 80,000 people march from Trafalgar Square to Victoria Park, where acts such as the Clash, Sham 69, UK Subs, Misty, Tom Robinson, and the reggae band Steel Pulse played. The second, on 24 September, brought 100,000 people to Brockwell Park. Smaller carnivals ran in Manchester, Cardiff, Southampton, Harwich, and Edinburgh, the last in Leeds in 1981.

"The Clash emblematized the movement, which transformed punk into a multicultural, anti-racist phenomenon and influenced the Two Tone revival. Their song 'Police and Thieves' adapted a Jamaican protest tune, while 'White Riot' encouraged young Whites to side with ethnic minorities in protesting the social problems of the period.

"For Ashley Dawson, Rock Against Racism's relationship with the Anti Nazi League marked a grass-roots appeal to agitation, in line with C. L. R. James's theories of community-based revolution. For Paul Gilroy, it attempted to decolonize the mind of white society" (Morley, "Rock").

> featured the first appearance before a mass audience by the Clash, whose enthusiasm for reggae made them … exponents of racial tolerance, along with X-Ray Spex, featuring mulatto singer Poly Styrene, and the openly gay Tom Robinson Band. The event "was a spectacular success," sending the "unequivocal message that, should National-Front activists attempt to capitalize on the mood [of intolerance] mobilized by Mrs. Thatcher, they would be opposed by a hefty segment of the day's youth." By 1979, unfortunately, RAR had already begun to deplete its political capital through "hardline rhetoric … in reaction to the National Front" … though the RAR remained viable through 1982. (7)

Even though, in its delight in negation, punk was often justifiably associated with "thuggery, misogyny, racism, [and] homophobia" (Marcus 75), the space it opened in the realm of popular culture was also a space of polymorphy and polyvocality: a space of "unmediated female noises never before heard as pop music" (Marcus 35) with bands such as The Raincoats, The Slits, and Siouxsie and the Banshees. It was also a space of racial tolerance and hybridity in which "the exclusiveness of Black West Indian style" and the "virtual impossibility of authentic white identification" with it provided a way for a "blatant disavowal of Britishness" as "a symbolic act of treason which complemented, indeed completed, the sacrilegious programme undertaken in punk rock itself" (Hebidge 64). Even if this was at times nothing more than "a white 'translation' of black 'ethnicity'" (64), bands like The Clash, X-Ray Spex, and 2-Tone[15] bands like The

[15] Two Tone or 2Tone was a "[m]usical genre invented in Coventry in the late 1970s and promoted through Jerry Dammers's 2Tone record label. Appropriately for a city with a large Jamaican population, it fused a punk guitar sound with elements of ska, reggae, and rock steady. The main bands, the Specials, the Selecter, and (from Birmingham) the Beat, were composed of black and white musicians, the concept of 2Tone being symbolic of multiculturalism as well as of the black and white 'rude boy' suits worn by the bands. … The 2Tone phenomenon is generally discussed in the context of Coventry's economic decline, following the collapse of the local automotive industry. The Specials' most famous and lasting song, 'Ghost Town', depicts

Specials, The Beat, Madness, and The Bodysnatchers were all not just "racially integrated," they also "embodied racial diversity in the *form* of their music" (Nehring 7). These were all modes of carnival which, like the Rave culture, tried to practice a fidelity to punk by celebrating various kinds of mixing, and by being dedicated to a "truth [that] is, as such, *indifferent to differences*" (Badiou, *Ethics* 27) and to a collective vision of society opposed to the Thatcherite notion of it as nothing but One collection of ones[16].

Ripping into Thatcherism: Ackroyd, Moore, and Sinclair

In all the above mentioned realms of culture – television, theatre, and music – as well as in literature and elsewhere, various folk demons Thatcherism had created took their imposed role seriously. In contrast to the notion of society made up of individuals as solitary atoms of consciousness, these folk demons elaborated a demonic vision of society in which forms of impure, grotesque mixing served as bases for various extraordinary projects. These projects practiced a fidelity to punk and their explicit purpose was to counter the main political culture: "As Mrs. Thatcher began to wield the lash of ideology," writes Jon Savage in his comprehensive analysis of punk, "so the figureheads of … [the punk movement in London] instinctively began to act out the chaos to which she appeared to offer a solution" (113). By raising the ghost of

---

violence – 'too much fightin' on the dance floor' – turning the city to a land of ghosts. The traditional reggae and dub ... effects of horn breaks, ghostly laughter and sudden changes in tempo evoke nostalgia for a remembered Caribbean" (Morley, "Two Tone").

[16] Some of these qualities can also be seen in Goth Music, which also had strong ties to Punk. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, bands such as Joy Division, Siouxsie and the Banshees, Bauhaus, and The Cure played music that can be seen as examples of proto-Goth music and which, as Charles Mueller writes, brought "a new sense of energy and immediacy to the punk style, attacking and mocking masculine structures of power, and appropriating signifiers from Gothic art, literature, and film to create a subversive effect" (75).

Victorianism, Thatcherism "introduced occultism into British political life;" by conjuring folk-demons, Thatcher opened herself to "the darkest demons of world politics" elaborated and wielded by, among others, various artists (Sinclair, qtd. in Murray 10). In their fidelity to the space in culture opened by punk – a space which allowed for a proliferation of practices of everyday life in and out of the realm of pop culture – the extraordinary projects of Ackroyd, Moore, and Sinclair are very much concerned with demonic possession, and this is our first link to the grotesque aspects of their works.

Now, the engagement with the notion of demonic possession is, strictly speaking, a sign of the gothic register/genre that these texts belong to (I will return to the idea of these texts' gothic register and this register's relationship to the grotesque shortly). However, even though these possessions are at times represented in terms divorced from the body, as ghostly and ethereal, they are always firmly rooted in a two-fold materiality: that of the city (a materiality of brick and mortar), and that of the human body (a materiality of flesh, bone, skin, and sinew). In this sense, novels such as Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor*, Moore and Campbell's *From Hell*, and Sinclair's *White Chappell, Scarlett Tracings* (*WCST*) can be seen as belonging to a post-punk era forming a historical constellation with definite earlier ones (Benjamin 263). In his study of Western arts movements of the twentieth century, Greil Marcus meticulously delineates ways punk forms a constellation with movements such as Dada and Guy Debord's Lettrist and Sutuationist Internationals; and via their fidelity to punk, the above-mentioned texts also form links to this tradition. Their focus on the materialities of the city and of the body echoes closely Debord's focus on the city as "a field of 'psychogeography'" (Marcus 154): rather than "a scrim of commodities and power" – as Thatcherism would see it – the city is here implicated in an "epistemology of everyday time and space" (154). Composed of "moments of life concretely,

deliberately, and freely created" (Debord, qtd. in Marcus 154), the city is no longer organised around "great men" and "the monuments they had left behind" (i.e. around Thatcher's Dick) but around "a history of moments: the sort of moments everyone once passed through without consciousness and that, now, everyone would consciously create" (Marcus 154).

By focusing on spaces where the materialities of the body and the city meet, the texts of Ackroyd, Moore, and Sinclair are examples of what Žižek calls "the theory of a failed practice" (*In Defense* 3). Where punk – which as an event in the realms of culture and practices of everyday life tried to turn "the masses" into "poets in action" (qtd. in Marcus 287) – had failed in its act of negation through which culture and practices of everyday life were nevertheless affected, these texts remain as "small circles of poetic adventure," the "only place where the totality of revolution subsists, as an unrealized but haunting possibility[17]" (287). This haunting possibility is best seen in Ackroyd's, Moore's, and Sinclair's texts' efforts to reveal London as a parallax space, a space that is uncovered "indirectly, by way of a triangulation based on the incommensurability" of, in this case, narratives and everyday practices that make up the city's material existence (Jameson, "First Impressions"). These texts, significantly, do this in a kind of contemporary gothic register which is supplemented and, consequently, augmented by a series of grotesque moments.

[17] Quoted from "All the King's Men," *Internationale Situationniste* 8 (January 1963): 31 – 32. The text, translated by Ken Knabb, can be found here: http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/kingsmen.html. Now, of course, the Situationists were making an argument about the relationship between revolutions and art movements. In the present context, the relationship is purely between different art movements which affect the practices of everyday life. In other words, Punk is here seen as an event within the realm of culture in relation to which artists such as Ackroyd, Moore, and Sinclair try to practice fidelity.

As an elaborator of circles of poetic adventure, Sinclair, for example, starts with the ghostly. The ethereal hauntings of London he often writes of are, as he notes, "post-sublime[18]" and rest on a gaze that is "fragmented," a "gaze of new technologies" akin to a "computer generated memory system" through which we are "constantly being observed[19]." As he continues, undoubtedly with Thatcherism in mind: "The sublime has been corrupted, moved on by the persuaders and corrupters and the tricksters," so that "the overwhelming experience" of the sublime, "a sense of your identity dissolving into this massive, shifting world … is not

[18] The Sublime is, in theorists such as Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant, generally theorised as something beyond the comprehension of the finite faculties possessed by humans. This is how the *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* describes it: "A concept deeply embedded in 18th-century aesthetics, but deriving from the 1st century rhetorical treatise *On the Sublime* by Longinus. The sublime is great, fearful, noble, calculated to arouse sentiments of pride and majesty, as well as awe and sometimes terror. According to Alexander Gerard, writing in 1759, 'When a large object is presented, the mind expands itself to the extent of that object, and is filled with one grand sensation, which totally possessing it, composes it into a solemn sedateness and strikes it with deep silent wonder and admiration: it finds such a difficulty in spreading itself to the dimensions of its object, as enlivens and invigorates its frame: and having overcome the opposition which this occasions, it sometimes imagines itself present in every part of the scene which it contemplates; and from the sense of this immensity, feels a noble pride, and entertains a lofty conception of its own capacity.' In Kant's aesthetic theory the sublime 'raises the soul above the height of vulgar commonplace.' We experience the vast spectacles of nature as 'absolutely great' and of irresistible might and power. This perception is fearful, but by conquering this fear, and by regarding as small 'those things of which we are wont to be solicitous' we quicken our sense of moral freedom. So we turn the experience of frailty and impotence into one of our true, inward moral freedom as the mind triumphs over nature, and it is this triumph of reason that is truly sublime. Kant thus paradoxically places our sense of the sublime in an awareness of ourselves as transcending nature, rather than in an awareness of ourselves as a frail and insignificant part of it. Most mountaineers and sailors disagree."

[19] This description ought to remind us of Moore and Lloyd's *V for Vendetta*, discussed in the Introduction, in which the inhabitants of England live in an authoritarian state whose leader is depicted as seated in a room filled with television monitors connected to a network of cameras placed throughout the city.

available to us any more" (Meacher). Thatcher has, in other words, largely persuaded us that there is no such thing as society into which a sense of one's identity could dissolve; the recouping and reformulation of this concept (i.e. society) and its associated practices therefore must take place. As we will see, this is what Ackroyd, Moore, and Sinclair's texts attempt to do, most often via an engagement with the grotesque.

The ghostly, post-sublime narrative strategy with which Sinclair starts, and to which we will return shortly, is closely related to what Arthur Redding has identified as "contemporary American gothic writing" (*Haints* 7). In the context of Reagan's and post-Reagan USA, this genre uses "spectral wavering images of potential alternative pasts" to delineate "another potential history and … America," as well as its "potential futures. If contemporary American gothic writing," continues Redding, "is haunted by a past that is either repressed, rewritten, abandoned, snuffed out, or mythicized, … it also speaks of and to a contemporary moment … that is 'unhinged' by the future" and that is often most clearly realized in "writing at and around the turn of the millennia" (7 – 8).

By struggling over the turn of the nineteenth century narratives' place in turn of the twentieth century London, the extraordinary projects of Ackroyd, Moore, and Sinclair – as projects which counter Thatcher's vision of society – similarly try to imagine alternative pasts and accompanying potential futures. However, the gothic – which is admittedly an aspect of the works to be discussed here and which often shares territory with the grotesque – is firmly rooted in the "immaterial or fugitive presences of the exiled and the abandoned" (Redding, *Haints* 9). While these presences are premised on a kind of Derridean "radical alterity" which sees "identity [as] haunted" by the other (Redding 22), the grotesque is unabashedly material and focuses on "*recognizing the Same*" (Badiou, *Ethics* 25) as that which "comes to be" as a "truth [that] is, as

such, *indifferent to differences*" (27) even and especially when it is promotive of difference: that truth is, in the present context, the truth of punk and its reconfiguration of practices of everyday life. So, while the gothic's central image is the ghost, the grotesque's is, in this same horror register, the zombie: not the immaterial, spectral return of that which has "never materialized" – "alternate pasts and potential presents" and "radical openness of the future and future beings" (Redding 37) – but the "shuffling, idiot bodies, wandering obliviously" through rural and urban spaces, "wailing with a hunger that can never be sated, listlessly tearing apart the flesh of the living" (Shaviro, "Capitalist Monsters" 288). That which has never materialized – alternate pasts, potential presents, and radical openness of the future – is here imaged as a deformed humanist/human remainder: a "universal residue" that represents "all that remains of 'human nature,' or even simply of a human scale, in the immense and unimaginable complex [post-sublime] network economy" (288) within which the Thatcherite individual operates under the supervision of the Thatcherite gaze. As we will see in the Conclusion, this is why the zombie is a figure worth struggling for. For now, let us return to the way grotesque moments emerge out of Sinclair's gothic framework.

Sinclair's narrative strategy often closely echoes the post-sublime, fragmented nature of the disembodied, ghostly Thatcherite gaze but it is also rooted in various types of materiality, supplementing and transforming a gothic register with grotesque moments[20]. The narrative strategy of *WCST*, for example, rests on paratactic juxtaposition of "nightmarishly hypertextual" narrative segments (Ferguson 50) which lack an explicitly unifying/organising voice, which, in turn, gives them an ethereal, ghostly aura: as the narrator of Sinclair's *Slow Chocolate Autopsy*

[20] You will remember from the first chapter that this is generally how the grotesque aesthetic form works: in the earlier discussion, grotesque moments supplemented and augmented the narrative/performance reality of a historical western (Tarantino) and a kind of Beckettian theatre (Kane).

(1997) notes, "stick any two postcards on a wall and you've got a [ghostly] narrative" (88); ghostly because of an apparent lack of material support (in the form of, for example, a coherent narrative voice associated with a narrating body). Referencing this graphic text illustrated by Dave McKean, Julian Wolfreys notes that "Sinclair's graphic mode," evidenced "not through 'illustration' in a pictorial rather than a written sense, but via synchronous revelation [between image and text] … 'does violence' to the eye, as well as to the language, in its multiplicity of signs irreducible to any calm order or linear narrative logic" ("Londonography"). This ghostly narrative strategy of *Slow Chocolate Autopsy* is, however, not unique to Sinclair's literally graphic text; it is simply an extension of a strategy already at work in Sinclair's non-illustrated texts. In *WCST* this is evidenced in the practice of paratactic juxtaposition of textual fragments that Murray identifies as "anti-narrative," "a dense and illogical narrative … that forces the reader to take on the process of reconstruction" of sense and meaning (49) – to, as it were, take up the (narrative) ghost him or herself.

At the same time, this spectral anti-narrative of *WCST* is rooted in a two-fold materiality of imagistic language. Here are the opening paragraphs of this, Sinclair's first, work of (non)poetic fiction:

> There is an interesting condition of the stomach where ulcers build like coral, fibrous tissues replacing musculature, cicatrix dividing that shady receptacle into two zones, with communication by means of a narrow isthmus: a condition spoken of with some awe, by the connoisseurs of pathology as 'hour glass stomach.'
>
> Waves of peristalists may be felt as they pass visibly across the upper half of the abdomen, left to right, as if conscious of diurnal etiquette. Friends of surgeons have watched mesmerized, gawping, with the empty minded rapture of plein-air sunset

> smudgers, at this revelation of secret tides. A boring pain recurs, beaks in the liver, even the thought of food becomes a torture; a description that starts at discomfort is refined with each meal taken until it colonises the entire consciousness, then copious vomiting, startling to casual observers, brings relief.
>
> Nicholas Lane, excarnate, hands on severely angled knees, stared out across the dim and featureless landscape, then dropped his gaze to the partly-fermented haddock, mixed with mucus, that poured from his throat, that hooked itself, bracken coloured, over the tough spears of roadside grass. Lumps, that were almost skin, split and fell to the ground. New convulsions took him: his bones rattled with their fury. Patches of steaming bouillabaisse spilled a shadow pool across the thin covering of snow. (3)

Nicholas Lane, "an icicle of pure intelligence" into whose intestines "nothing could get into … so he functioned directly on head energy," whose skin is "damp paper over bone" (4), is the signifier of the narrative's ghostly formal strategy, of its impossible and ultimately ineffective attempt to move beyond the confines of the body into the (post-sublime) ethereal. It is the brief images, like the one cited above – images of the "interesting condition of the stomach where ulcers build like coral" – that prevent the text from escaping the material logic of the body, and of the city. This quasi-Bakhtinian dedication to the body is an important tool in our authors' efforts to redefine society in collectivist rather than individualistic terms. While the Thatcherite notion of society functions in terms of paratactic ordering of individuals whose (dare I say, ghostly) association is purely ideological, this dedication to the body is an affirmation of the "collective, growing, and continually renewed body of the people" that represents "a material bodily whole" which "transgresse[s] the limits of … [the individual bodies'] isolation. The private and the universal … [are here] blended in a contradictory unity" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 23).

Trudging from town to town in search of rare books, the narrator, with his companions Nicholas Lane and Dryfeld – the later of which is, unlike Lane, a "meaty" man (6), whose "shaven [skull] … was so massive and burdened with unassimilated information that it tipped aggressively forward," a man who would have made a perfect study for Max Beckmann whose "darkest self-portraits hint at something of Dryfeld's flavour" (5) – moves "through the secret intestines of … town[s]" that often seem to be living organisms (13). This episodic/imagistic materiality of the narrative contrasts starkly with its ghostly narrative form, a form that makes out of the novel "a highly condensed metaphysical puzzle which … generates an almost endless variety of meanings" and is designed to produce "intellectual uncertainty," a mental state that "has been singled out as the essential factor in producing the feeling of the uncanny" (Emilsson 276). This contrast is tactical, its two elements working toward a unified goal. Together with the narrative's often-sudden juxtaposition of occurrences that take place in two different temporal spaces[21] (one in mid-to-late 1980s and the other in mid-to-late 1880s), the text's ghostly or gothic form, its uncanniness, aims to dislocate the reader out of his or her time-coordinates. The concreteness with which bodies and the city are represented, on the other hand, aims to embed the reader in a firmly material universe, a geographical space co-created by the text in concert with a presupposed material reality of the world (the city of London) the reader

[21] Chapter 2, which follows the chapter in which we are introduced to the narrator, Lane, and Dryfeld, starts as follows: "A wharfinger is a man of business, and eats accordingly. John Gull, Senior, his back to the land, attended to his breakfast with a severe and methodical concentration. He did not make two cuts where one cut would serve. Even the flesh of swine could be brought to use, divided in moral symmetry, tasted, swallowed, the worthy elements put to work, the worthless burnt in the stomach's pit, stamped down, expelled: the sheep parted from the goats" (19). Aside from introducing imagery that is to be repeated in the work of John Gull, Junior, the alleged Jack the Ripper, the beginning of this chapter continues the temporal dislocation of the reader in order better to embed him or her within the materiality of the body and of the city in which the Ripper murders are to take place.

inhabits. (This is the first sign of the parallax gap logic of the text in which narrative and spatial practices [*à la* de Certeau's notion of "walking in the city" where "bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it" (93)] come together to defend the integrity of the parallax gap from erasure/rationalisation.)

So, for example, *WCST* explores the question of whether texts create or simply forecast events that take place in the real world: "Rimbaud's occult awareness was so intense," writes Sinclair, "he was burning his own time so recklessly, all or nothing, that he described more fiercely than any other man, then or now, the elements of the Whitechapel millennial sacrifice. And by describing, *caused* them" (120). In a similar attempt to create links between narrative space and the space of everyday practices, *WCST* tries to embed the reader within a newly-created space that is multi-(or non)-temporal but geographically one – a 'one' that is, however, simultaneously more than one, that is the multiplicity of discourses that produce London, discourses emanating from both the text (as narrative) and the real-world metropolis as "practices organizing a bustling city" through activities as simple as walking (De Certeau 93). *WCST* tries to embed the reader within the parallax gap that is London, a city whose grotesque status is signalled by both the bodies that live in and occupy it, and by the disarticulated bodies used to rationalize and erase it; but more of this in a space of a few pages.

Peter Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor* uses a similar strategy, even though its narrative methods of temporal dislocation are more orderly and structured. Like *WCST*, *Hawksmoor* presents a double narrative located within the (parallax) space of London: one set in the late twentieth century and the other in the first decades of the eighteenth, during the city's rebuilding in the aftermath of the Great Fire of 1666. The novel is, like *WCST*, a metaphysical detective story structured around a series of murders taking place in the eighteenth century and seemingly echoed and investigated

in the twentieth[22]. The concept of *echoing*, a kind of ghostly/gothic reverberation across the temporal boundary, is, indeed, the main principle through which the two time periods interpenetrate. For example, the first chapter, set in the eighteenth century and clearly demarcated by the first person narrator's diction and spelling[23], ends in the area of "Spittle-Fields" with the words "I am in the Pitte, but I have gone so deep that I can see the brightness of the Starres at Noon" (25). The opening line of the second chapter, written in modern diction and with modern spelling, echoes yet (graphically) distorts this line: "At noon, they were approaching the church in Spitalfields" (26). Such echoes of lines of narration or dialogue together with echoes of names and events within Ackroyd's novel create a matrix of narrative elements that defines *Hawksmoor* as a text that collapses the temporal dimension in order to elaborate a more purely spatial one which, as in Sinclair, includes both the narrative space of the novel and the actual space of the reader's location (ideally, London). This spatial logic of the text and its ghostly formal double culminate in the novel's (two) final image(s) in which the protagonists – Nicholas Dyer and Nicholas Hawksmoor – mysteriously become one, and more than one: in the only fictional architectural space in the text – the Church of Little St. Hugh in

[22] Emilsson writes: "The term 'metaphysical detective story' refers to experimental, self-reflexive detective fiction that plays with and questions the highly rationalistic paradigms of traditional detective stories. Typical strategies of this subversive type of detective fiction include the blurring of the boundary between detectives and criminals and a resistance to the rigorous closure of classic detective writing. As a rule, the authors of metaphysical detective stories are more interested in questions than answers. Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney's introduction to *Detecting Texts* (1998)**,** the first collection of critical essays to 'track down the metaphysical detective story' (1), is an excellent account of the nature and history of the genre" (286).

[23] For the opening lines of the novel, see the first epigraph.

Black Step Lane[24] – the two protagonists of the novel "cross[ ] the threshold" (209, 216), "run[ning] to the end of [their] Time[s]" (209) until they are "face to face" yet looking "past one another at the pattern which they cast upon the stone; for when there was a shape there was a reflection, and when there was a light there was a shadow, and when there was a sound there was an echo, and who could say where one had ended and the other had begun? And when they spoke they spoke with one voice" (217).

As Alex Link, writing of "Gothic spatialities" in the London of Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor*, notes, through this echoing strategy,

> *Hawksmoor* … interrogates historicity in a London that precedes the subject and that furnishes a palimpsestic complexity transcending the subject's grasp. It posits a London replete with forgotten places that repress the excess traditionally apparent in the popular and in the feminine [Hall's folk demons], and that offer the possibility of social relations unmediated by modern capitalism or national history. When these places reemerge in the uncanny, they open a space for popular voices, and they realign the urban subject's relation to urban history by fracturing its apparent seamlessness. In the process, *Hawksmoor* offers a rejoinder to theories of the postmodern urban condition by suggesting that it is a condition that has never ceased to be. Theories of the postmodern, then, are symptomatic in *Hawksmoor* both of a materiality constitutive of the historical urban cityscape and of an all-too-successful repression of this materiality by a complex of

[24] Nicholas Dyer, a kind of fictional echo of the real-life architect Nicholas Hawksmoor (c. 1661 – 1736), is commissioned to "erect seven new Parish Churches in the Cities of London and Westminster" (*Hawksmoor* 1). Along with the six churches the actual Hawksmoor designed and built between 1714 and 1731 – Christ Church, Spitalfields; St George's, Bloomsbury; St Mary Woolnoth; St George in the East, St Anne's Limehouse; St Alfege Church, Greenwich – the fictional Dyer is commissioned to design and build the (seventh) fictional Little St Hugh in Black Step Lane.

> political and scientific … powers extending from the Enlightenment's Christopher Wren to the Thatcher administration of the 1980s. (516)

The materiality elaborated by Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor*, a materiality that is too often all-too-successfully smothered by a particular brand of conservative rationality is, like that of *WCST*, dual: it is a materiality of the body and that of the city, a materiality that here symbolically comes together in the human sacrifices one of the two protagonists of the novel – the architect Nicholas Dyer – quite literally embeds into the foundations of the churches he is erecting across London's East End. These sacrifices are, importantly, most often composed of dislocated bodies – the poor, vagrants – who are in the novel represented as "figure[s] who stand[ ] out of time" and whose sufferings "are as perpetual as the city [of London] itself" (Charnick). They are the embodiments of Thatcher's folk-demons: the poor, the single mums, the immigrants, whose bodies have figuratively and literally been the foundations upon which great men's monuments have been built throughout history. These bodies are also, however, "the ultimate expression of the motif of the urban walker," embodying "for Ackroyd the relationship between the City and its vulnerable citizens" (Charnick). Furthermore, by existing as bodies in both the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries, these are bodies via which "individuality is given up" in favour of "certain characteristics recurring in the course of time" (Grundmann 5).

Sinclair presents walking in the city as performed by bodies working in book-dealing – "precisely [one of] those 'soft' art areas, unprofitable but personally rewarding, which have always found little favor with Conservatives" and which should, therefore, be "considered as angry ripostes to the rhetoric of Thatcher[25]" (McRobbie, qtd. in Nehring 17). By doing this,

[25] This logic is somewhat complicated by the fact that even in this "soft art area," the protagonists of the novel are looking for that 'golden ticket' that would make them rich – the first edition of Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet*. This, again, shows how Thatcher's world is also our world.

Sinclair opens the narrative space of the text to the space of everyday practices performed by acts as simple as walking in the city in search of books. Ackroyd, on the other hand, directly images attempts to eliminate the city-walkers/folk demons who would disturb the smooth functioning of society as imagined by Thatcherism (this is also a strategy which *WCST* and *From Hell* take up through their engagement with the figure of Jack the Ripper and his victims – prostitutes, the literal streetwalkers): "[T]here is a certain ridiculous Maxim that *The Church loves not Blood*," Dyer narrates, linking the sacrifice of the text's folk-demons to the structures of power, "but this is nothing to the Case for the Eucharist must be mingled with Blood. Thus I have found the Sacrifice desir'd in the Spittle-Fields, and as I coached it from White-chappell I rejoyced exceedingly" (25). Via these images and via the accompanying formal narrative strategies, Ackroyd's novel tries, as does *WCST*, to embed the reader within the parallax gap that is London, a metropolis whose grotesque status is signalled by both the bodies that live in and occupy it, and by the bodies used to rationalize and erase it. But, again, more of this in a space of just a few more pages.

This spatial, material logic is most literally imaged in two sections of Moore and Campbell's *From Hell*. The opening page of the second chapter [Figure 5], entitled "A state of darkness" and marked by the words "The Limehouse Cut – July 1827," depicts nine black, symmetrical, evenly spaced, rectangular panels within which speech bubbles represent seven instances of contextless utterance from what we later learn is the life of Sir William Withey Gull, the royal physician to Queen Victoria and the text's Jack the Ripper[26]. The only (thrice) repeated

[26] The equation of Sir William Withey Gull and Jack the Ripper is, in both *From Hell* and Sinclair's *WCST*, based on a book by Stephen Knight entitled *Jack the Ripper: The Final Solution*. The theories presented in this text have been largely disproven, yet they provide a rich mythology for both Sinclair and Moore to draw upon in their exploration of Thatcher's London. It is, of course, not the factual matter of Knight's text that

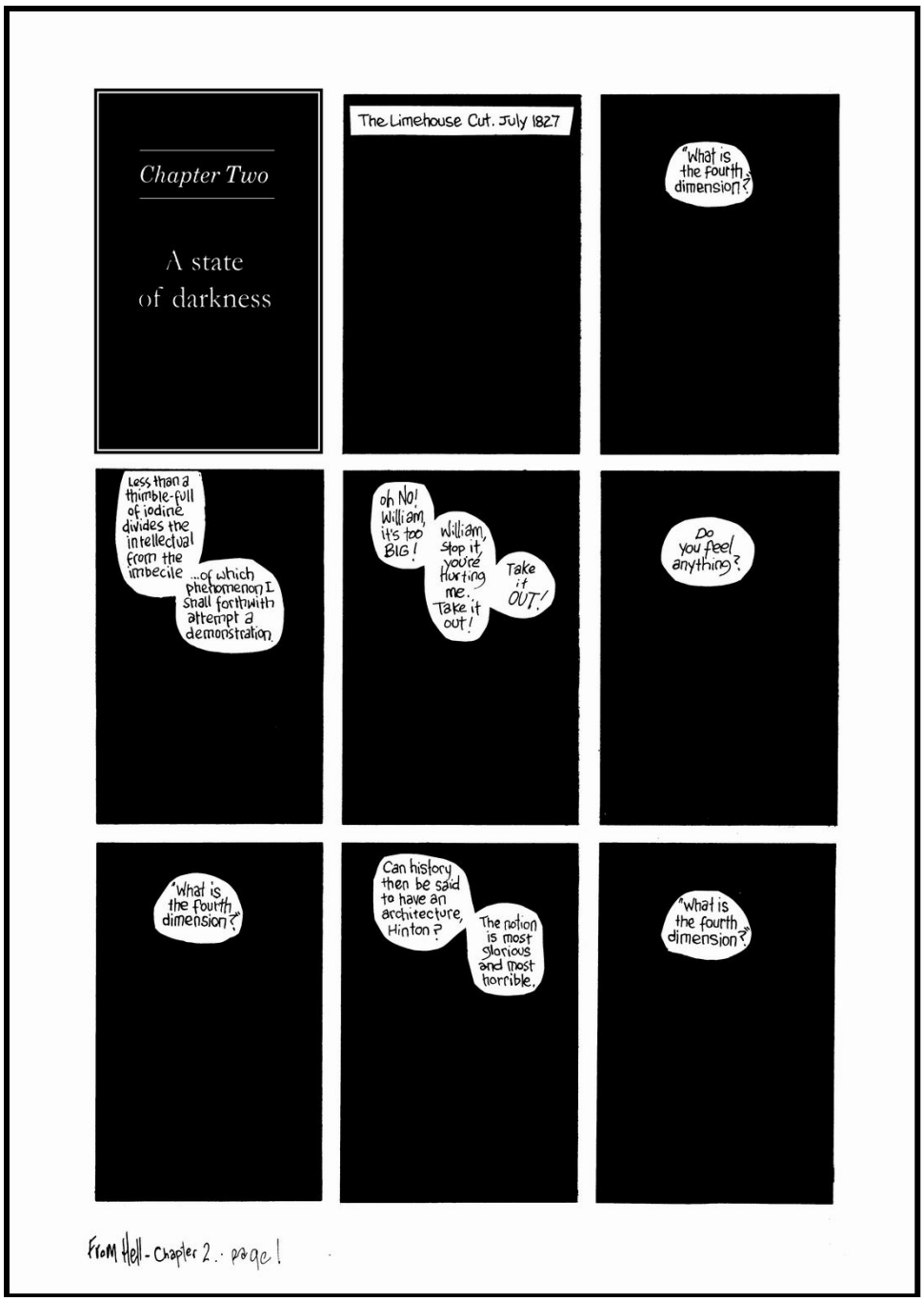


Figure 5: What is the Fourth Dimension?

proves so appealing to authors like Sinclair and Moore; rather, it is its mythology. As Moore himself acknowledges: "[D]espite the Gull theory's obvious attractions, the idea of a solution, any solution, is inane. Murder isn't like books. Murder, a human event located in both space and time, has an imaginary field completely unrestrained by either. It holds meaning, and shape, but no solution. Quantum uncertainty, unable to determine both a particle's location and its nature, necessitates that we map every possible state of the particle: its super-position. Jack's not Gull, or Druitt. Jack is a Super-Position" (*From Hell* Appendix II, 16)

line on this page asks "What is the fourth dimension?" and Mark Bernard and James Bucky Carter, in their study of Alan Moore's comics as vehicles of the fourth dimension, answer:

> The term … refers to a special relationship with space and time wherein the two conflate such that infinite multiple dimensionalities become simultaneously present. When the reader's interaction, his or her own space-time, is accounted for, this evocation of space-time becomes quite literal and expands exponentially. The fourth dimension is bridged by human experience and interaction. The spontaneous, real-time interplay of all these forces at once creates an ethereal dimension … [that] we refer to as the fourth dimension. … [T]he fourth dimension is defined as simultaneous, multitudinous dimensionality deeply entwined in and part of individual experience.

The fourth dimension – a term borrowed from the work of Charles Howard Hinton whose father, James, was (in real life) once described by Sir William Gull as "one of the pioneers of humanity through the obscure and dark ways of the senses to the region of truth" (qtd. in Moore and Lloyd ii, epigraph) – is the space paradoxically generated through the suppression of the actual fourth dimension of spacetime, through the suppression or condensation of time itself. This timeless (or, more precisely, time-circumscribed) space in which narratives and practices work together is the space of parallax.

Out of this space, opened up by the nine panels and the gutters on the first page of the second chapter, in which disparate temporal points (both narrative and actual) paradoxically coalesce in the Limehouse Cut in July of 1827, emerges the figure of William Gull [Figure 6], speaking to his father of his hope that "the Lord may choose for [him] a task most difficult … most necessary and severe" (ii, 2 – 3). Out of the parallax, from among panels symmetrically ordered, emerges Jack the Ripper. As we will soon see, this 'birth' of the mythical Ripper – and

the Ripper and his equation with Sir William Gull are in Moore's (and Sinclair's) text(s) clearly a myth[27] – begets a kind of multiple-continuous material presence of the city of London as well as various attempts to rationalize it, various attempts to stop the (parallax) gap. This particularly modern political rationalization of the city-space is closely related to mis-treatment of the body and its form, and, consequently, with the grotesque. But, again…

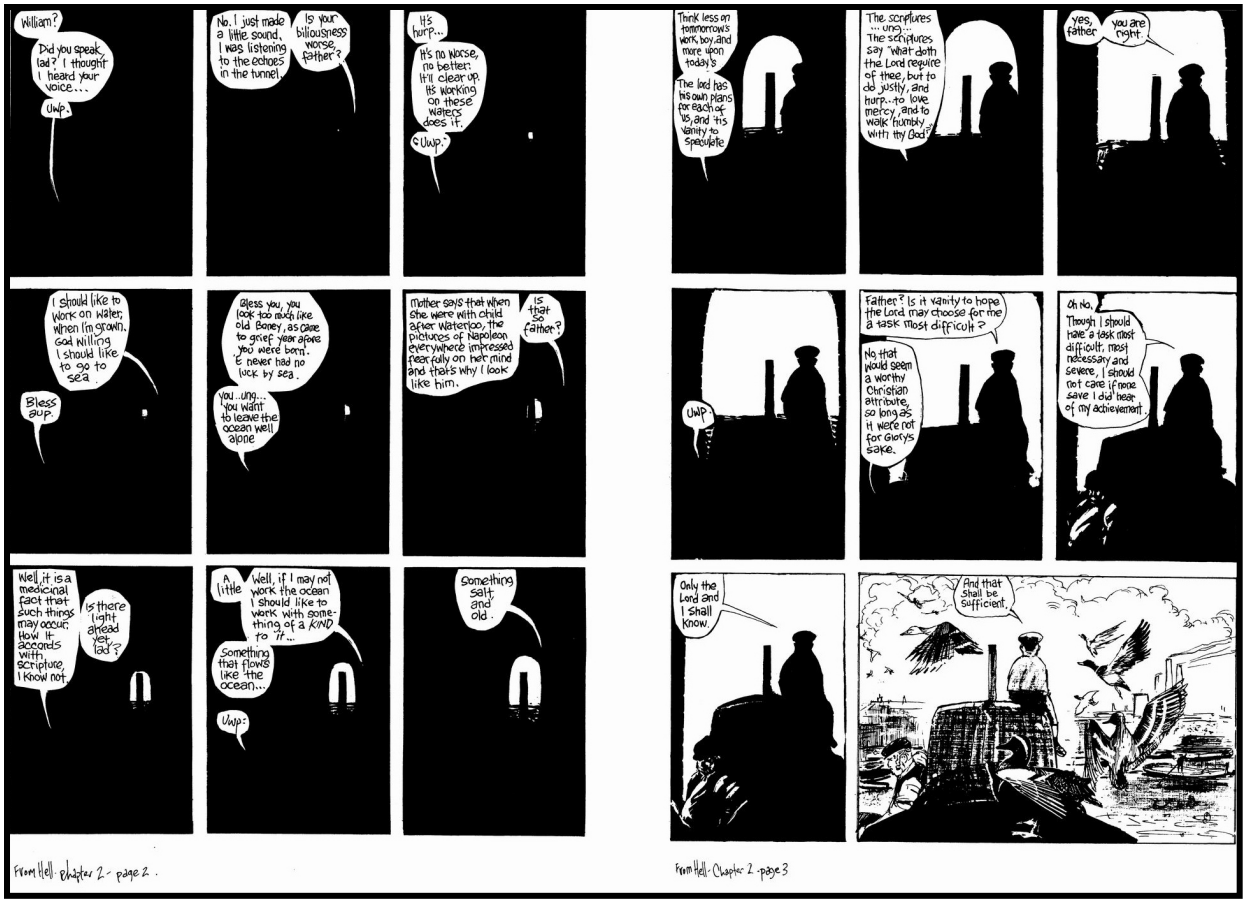


Figure 6: Out of the Darkness, Jack

Later in the text, on two separate occasions, after Ripper has emerged out of London embodied and fully realized in William Gull, amidst "the painstaking *giallo*-esque depictions" of his victims' eviscerations during which the text's words "struggle to contain the [bloody] excess of the illustrations" (Ferguson 56), Gull finds himself before, and then inside, a twentieth century

[27] See, most importantly, *From Hell*'s second appendix, "Dance of the gull catchers."

Figure 7: Ripping into Today

office building [Figures 1 and 7]. Again, as in Ackroyd's and Sinclair's texts, the extreme representations of the materiality of the body and the materiality of the city merge, are shown to be closely united as Gull's violent penetration of the (female, folk-demon) body is aligned with his penetration of the city's structural language and its temporal boundaries. As do the images in *From Hell*'s fourth chapter – in which Gull rides about London with his coachman Netley, reading the city and concluding, "Our story's WRITTEN … inked in blood long dry … engraved in stone" (37 – 38) – the images of Gull in the late twentieth century reveal the city as a space of parallax in which brick and flesh are made to coalesce. Both times, with a bloody knife in his hand, Gull stands physically transplanted into the late twentieth century, indicating the text's elaboration of the fourth dimension, implicating the reader and his or her own time in, and drawing them into, the text's narrative ark:

> Dear God, what is this Aethyr I am come upon? [Gull asks as he stares in wonder upon the oblivious office-workers.] What spirits are these, labouring in what heavenly light? No… No, this is dazzle, but not yet divinity. Nor are these heathen wraiths about me spirits lacking even that vitality. What, then? Am I, like Saint John the Divine,

> vouchsafed a glimpse of those last times? Are these the days my death shall spare me? It would seem we are to suffer an apocalypse of cockatoos… morose, barbaric children playing joylessly with their unfathomable toys. Where comes this dullness in your eyes? How has your century numbed you so? Shall man be given marvels only when he is beyond all wonder? Your days were born in blood and fires, whereof in you I may not see the meanest spark! Your past is pain and iron! Know yourselves! With all your shimmering numbers and your lights, think not to be inured to history. Its black root succours you. It is INSIDE you. Are you asleep to it, that cannot feel its breath upon your neck, nor see what soaks its cuffs? See me! Wake up and look upon me! I am come amongst you. I am with you always. (x, 21 – 22)

Jack the Ripper's world is our world, then. His emergence out of London as a space of parallax – in which narrative(s) and everyday practice(s) are two elements through which London as an actual material space is constituted – echoes punk as "a time in London … when Jack the Ripper was the ultimate punk" (Marcus 75). This realization that his world is our world, that he is also we, is the necessary complement to a theoretical and actual reconceptualization of society in opposition to its elaboration as nothing more than One array of ones.

The Matter/Space of Parallax

The London of Sinclair, Ackroyd, and Moore – the London constructed dialectically by drawing the actual city (as a space of practice) into the narrative matrix of its representations – is the parallax object. It rests, as previously stated, on a triangulation of narrative space and that of everyday practices in relation to which the city of London is revealed as both actual and fictional, as the city itself and its being-written, which are bound together "in a new form that has a

simultaneous impact on the nature of things and on the social context, while it is not reducible to the one or the other" (Latour 5). If the parallax is commonly defined as "the apparent displacement of an object (the shift of its position against a background), caused by a change in observational position that provides a new line of sight" (Žižek, *The Parallax View* 17), one must add to this understanding of the parallax what Žižek calls a "philosophical twist":

> [T]he observed difference [of the object in relation to one's observational position] is not simply "subjective," due to the fact that the same object which exists "out there" is seen from two different stances, or points of view. It is rather that, as Hegel would have put it, subject and object are inherently "mediated," so that *an "epistemological" shift in the subject's point of view always reflects an "ontological" shift in the object itself*. Or – to put it in Lacanese – the subject's gaze is always-already inscribed into the perceived object itself, in the guise of its "blind spot," that which is "in the object more than the object itself," the point from which the object returns the gaze. "Sure, the picture is in my eye, but I, I am also in the picture": the first part of Lacan's statement designates subjectivization, the dependence of reality on its *subjective constitution*; while the second part provides a *materialist supplement*, reinscribing the subject into its own image in the guise of a stain (the objectivized splinter in its eye). (Žižek, *The Parallax View* 17, emphasis added)

In the present context, following Žižek 's formulation, London is *subjectively* constituted through narrative space(s) which retain their multiplicity within the unity of London as an actual physical space. The materialist supplement is here exemplified by practices of everyday life, what Debord identifies as "moments of life concretely, deliberately, and freely created" (qtd. in Marcus 154), which are introduced into the narrative space via these texts' elaboration of the

fourth dimension as fictionalised yet actual (our) history of London as a fictionalised yet actual (our) lived space.

In order to illustrate this conceptualisation of London allow me to briefly consider the Yorkville area of the city I am better familiar with: Toronto. In the 1960s, this part of Toronto was "Canada's Haight-Ashbury," lined with coffee houses the most famous of which was The Riverboat, "where people like Gordon Lightfoot, Joni Mitchell, Steppenwolf, Neil Young, and Rick James played before they went south" (Micallef 79). Today, through a somewhat atypical process of gentrification which made it "a neighbourhood that belongs a little to Toronto, but mostly to everybody else" (76), Yorkville is dominated by upscale restaurants, hotels, and shops, and the four hundred metre stretch of Yorkville Avenue between Bay Street and Avenue Road is where the affluent use the short Toronto summer to eat, drink, shop, and drive around in expensive cars. Yet, as Shawn Micallef notes, perhaps there is "something a little rebellious" left still in and around Yorkville: "If there is," he writes, "it's best found on foot, as Yorkville's secrets are often down little passageways, meant to be stumbled upon randomly" (77). A condo has integrated the façade of Toronto's first Jewish general hospital, and while all signs of the once famous Nimbus 9 recording studio are now gone, "if you continue to wander north [from where it used to stand] … you'll find bits of Yorkville's past tucked in between the swaths of its future: an old house, the original fire hall, the roof of a house peeking over a store … – all remnants of somebody's historic Yorkville and pieces of somebody else's current one" (81). If, walking down Yorkville among white leather shoes and expensive suits, one were to imagine Jack the Ripper violently dispatching one of his victims a hundred years ago in an once old house around the corner, a strange parallel would emerge between the kinds of power hovering along the street. Masculine violence enacted upon women's bodies – in Sinclair's and Moore's

texts associated with Queen Victoria and, hence, with Margaret Thatcher – would here meet the power of wealth, and the strange short period of time when Yorkville was known for bohemian and countercultural (artistic) practices would allow for a creation of a kind of personal historical constellation within which one's practices of everyday life would take on a particular meaning contrasting, at least partially, the everyday practices currently on display. The Jack the Ripper narrative here allows for a subjective constitution of Yorkville as a narrative space in which kinds of power meet, while everyday practices – walking, eating, shopping, choices of living location and modes of transportation – would introduce a materialist supplement that Debord identifies as moments of life concretely, deliberately, and freely created. The wager of this chapter is that these moments, as small circles of poetic adventure captured in texts, and the "only place[s] where the totality of revolution subsists, as an unrealized but haunting possibility" (Marcus 287), can carry substantial political significance.

So what, strictly speaking and according to the above understanding of parallax, is materialism or the materialist supplement that, as we will see, plays a crucial role in Sinclair's, Ackroyd's, and Moore's grotesque projects? What is the materialism of cities like London and of the bodies that fill it?

> Materialism is not the direct assertion of my inclusion in objective reality (such an assertion presupposes that my position of enunciation is that of an external observer who can grasp the whole of reality); rather, it resides in the reflexive twist by means of which I … am included in the picture constituted by me – it is this reflexive short circuit, this necessary redoubling of myself as standing both outside and inside my picture, that bears witness to my "material existence." Materialism means that the reality I see is never

> "whole" – not because a large part of it eludes me, but because it contains a stain, a blind spot, which indicates my inclusion in it. (Žižek, *The Parallax View* 17)

London's parallax shift in both text and in reality is premised on a multiplication of narratives about it and on multiplication of possibilities of everyday practice, which become dialectically sublated (*aufgehoben*[28]) in the city itself, in its ontological status. One of the main reasons that theory and practice can never perfectly meld into something like the ideal or consistent form of Marxist praxis is that everyday practices, which here form an important component of political

[28] "*Aufheben* is the truth of a past, the being-past [*l'être-passé*] of truth, yet Hegel does not expressly determine his concept through this trait. On the other hand, it is indeed under the heading, or the law, of this always-past [*toujours-passé*] that the *aufheben* posits its word and is inscribed in the text. One cannot but have noticed the singular syntax of the first sentence of the Remark: '*To sublate* [*aufheben*] and the *sublated* [*das Aufgehobene*] … constitute one of the most important concepts': a plural works as a singular – one concept is made up of (or in any case designated by) the infinitive of a verb (not even nominalized) *and* the past participle in the passive form of that verb. The Hegelian *Aufheben* is almost always, in Hegel's text, a verb (rather than the noun *Aufhebung*) – and simultaneously, a verb in the past and in the present tense. Or rather, since the two verb tenses [*modes verbaux*] are forcibly distinguished – whether it is a matter of the operation ('What is sublated is not thereby reduced to nothing'), or of its result ('what is sublated is at the same time preserved') – one could say that the *aufheben* is referred to as the permanent passage of its verb to the past tense and to the passive mode. For such an operation lies wholly in its result, and since, moreover, this result consists entirely in the preservation of the operation, as far as the latter is twofold, and that what it brings about is simultaneity of these two aspects (a simultaneity that, under a single concept, is a consubstantiality). On the one hand, the operation, the sublation, the truth of the already-past [*dejà-passé*] is given only when its double component (or 'nature') is given, that is, actualized – on the other hand, the result, the sublated, hands over only its double operation. If, then, we confine ourselves to the word or, more precisely, to the double-word, the double form *aufheben*/ *aufgehoben*, the *Aufhebung* is both something that has already happened and something that still has to happen. The first 'modality' could well be a first determination or a first effect of what the Remark first observes, namely that this 'important concept … repeatedly occurs everywhere [throughout the whole of philosophy].' The 'return' [*Wiederkehr*] of the *aufheben* is always the return of a past, or the return to the past, unless it be the return of a still-to-come [*un encore-à-venir*]: in any case the return of a passage insofar as it has happened or will have happened [*en tant qu'il (s')est passém ou qu'il (se) sera passé*]. In some way the *aufheben* has thus already raised the question of its presence" (Nancy 30).

practices in general, are precisely the (theoretical) blind spot that bears witness to our material existence. This is also why theorizing/narrative-making as a fidelity to an event must always come before and after the fact, as what Žižek calls a theory of a failed practice, a fact evidenced by the works of (among others) Ackroyd, Moore, and Sinclair, the works that we have earlier described as practicing a fidelity to punk as an event *in its aftermath*.

So, punk tapped into the anger and frustration of youth who were "intelligent in a working-class culture which did not value intelligence, yet unable to leave that culture because of lack of opportunity" (Savage 114) in order to transform their endemic boredom into bursts of speed and energy which galvanized an entire culture. By doing so, it multiplied ways in which this youth could develop and distribute everyday practices: practices of musical and fashion styles, but also styles of intrapersonal association and of production and distribution of material goods which, again, "became the hidden positive to Punk's much flaunted negative, a practical decentralisation with infinite possibilities" (Savage xv). At the same time, however, as a theoretical blind spot, this redistribution of practice(s) is often caught up in a series of apparent logical self-contradictions, and this fact was on full display in punk in both its often-reactionary attitudes toward race and gender, but also in its very ontological stance: "Despite what many of the [punk] groups professed," writes Savage, "the movement enshrined failure: to succeed in conventional terms meant that you had failed on your own terms; to fail meant that you had succeeded" (140).

Now, the above mentioned sublation of narrative(s) and practice(s) in the parallax space of London is premised on a triadic, and hence quasi-Hegelian, move from multiplicity (many) to univocity (one) within which contradictions are maintained – a univocity of disjunctive synthesis. This is a repetition of the schema of the grotesque elaborated via the triad corporeal-ontological-

MULTIPLICITY. The narrative space is here aligned with the ontological while the space of practice is aligned with the corporeal. Earlier, these two components of the triad were elaborated as (corporeal) matter – bodies, which often achieve coherence as 'one,' as organisms – and as (ontological) force of matter acting upon itself which, strictly speaking, causes the grotesque body to appear *as* grotesque[29]. As before, these two components presuppose one another. Here, however, the 'ontological' is subjectively constituted in the form of narrative(s) which reveal the "'ontological' shift" in the object (i.e. the city of London), a shift that embodies the "'epistemological' shift in the subject's point of view" (Žižek, *The Parallax View* 17), the point of view that is in the present context initiated by and instantiated in the form of everyday practice(s) as corporeal. All these ultimately stem from the event: punk.

More concretely, we should here recall the above-delineated argument that the everyday practice(s) made possible by punk effected an epistemological shift in punks' point of view, which gave rise to the possibility of developing various extraordinary projects in opposition to Thatcherism. These extraordinary projects are (results of) precisely the kind of ontological shift Žižek points to. By redistributing the perceptible/audible – in the form of a "sound [that] was irrational," that "seemed to make no sense at all, to make nothing, only to destroy" so that it could make newly perceptible that which "countless people" in the 1970s "were now allowed to play and what they were now allowed to hear" (Marcus 61) – punk created an epistemological shift in its subjects' point of view/practices of everyday life. This, synchronously, effected an ontological shift in that it made possible a certain kind of narrative, exemplified by the works of Ackroyd, Moore, and Sinclair; works which draw upon punk's use of the grotesque aesthetic form to elaborate anti-Thatcherite socio-political projects.

[29] See the Introduction, 33ff.

MULTIPLICITY, elaborated in the introduction as giving rise to univocity cutting across both the ontological and the corporeal, in the present context assumes a similar function. It, allow me to repeat myself here, points to univocity of the multiple, of multiplicity, which does not function on the substantial level of either the ontological or the corporeal. Rather, the univocity resides in the relation between the two, as a second-order relation and an animating principle of the World(s) composed of the corporeal and the ontological and their relations. It is for this reason that univocity is at the same time of both the ontological and the corporeal and, at the same time, of neither of those two: "There are not two 'paths,' as Parmenides' poem suggests, but a single 'voice' of Being … [a voice] of difference itself" (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 36). This voice is nothing but the logic of MULTIPLICITY emanating from the relation between the corporeal as multiplicity of practice and the ontological as multiplicity of narrative. This relation is immanent to the corporeal and the ontological.

In the present context, then, this MULTIPLICITY is what guarantees that when we speak of the space of narrative and the space of practice, we are always speaking of narrative(s) and of practice(s). Furthermore, this MULTIPLICITY allows there to be a relation between the two kinds of spaces: that of narrative(s) and that of practice(s). The single voice of Being with which all that is said of difference is said is here the voice that "denie[s] all social facts, and in that denial affirm[s] that everything [is] possible" (Marcus 2). This is the voice of *negation*, a voice which provides a link between narrative(s) and everyday practice(s) as qualitatively different forms of space, and which Greil Marcus carefully differentiates from Nihilism:

> Nihilism means to close the world around its own self-consuming impulse; negation is the act that would make it self-evident to everyone that the world is not as it seems – but only when the act is so implicitly complete it leaves open the possibility that the world

> may be nothing, that nihilism as well as creation may occupy the suddenly cleared ground[30]. The nihilist, no matter how many people he or she might kill, is always a solipsist: no one exists but the actor…. When the nihilist pulls the trigger, turns on the gas, sets the fire, hits the vein, the world ends. Negation is always political: it assumes the existence of other people, calls them into being. Still, the tools the negationist seems forced to use – real or symbolic violence, blasphemy, dissipation, contempt, ridiculousness – change hands with those of the nihilist. (8 – 9)

Instantiations of real or symbolic violence, blasphemy, dissipation, and contempt directed at the human form, the denial of social facts as facts, and the political nature of these tactical maneuvers are fundamental components of the grotesque, and they are here revealed as rooted in the voice of negation. The narrative(s) and everyday practice(s) that this voice of negation makes possible are at the root of the parallax gap of a space such as London. MULTIPLICITY, then, allows there to be a kind of consistency within the realm of disjunctive synthesis and Thatcherism's attempt to stop the parallax gap is an attempt to erase this MULTIPLICITY from being while also repurposing it to establish a connection between the narrative of UK's Victorian roots – from which, according to Thatcher, "our country became great" (qtd. in McCaw 26) – and Thatcherism's political practices. The attempt to stop the parallax gap is thus an attempt to establish a particular narrative and political practice as necessary – as undeniable social fact – via a historicist (as opposed to a historical materialist) elaboration of history.

The move from pure multiplicity to a kind of cacophonous univocity (via disjunctive synthesis) is closely related to both punk's "unmediated female [and racially integrated] noises

[30] This insight will reappear at the end of the final chapter to note that even though empirical reality is and must always be *univocal*, its status as necessarily contingent reveals that the gap between the actuality of there being bodies and the actuality of there being nothing is minimal, always asymptotically approaching zero.

never before heard as pop music" (Marcus 35) and to the polyphonic or heteroglot organisation of Sinclair's, Ackroyd's, and Moore's texts, whose chief characteristic lies in what Bakhtin calls *heteroglossia*, "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices" (Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 6). These texts' stylistic uniqueness "consists … in the combination of … subordinated, yet still relatively autonomous, unities (even at times comprised of different languages) into the higher unity of the work as a whole: the style of [these] novels is to be found in the combination of [their] styles; [their] language," in other words, "is the system of [their] languages" (Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" 262). (I will return to the constitutive role of heteroglossia in these texts shortly.) The city of London elaborated in these heteroglot/polyphonic texts is, then, the narrative (multiple yet one) space into which the actual city of London is drawn as a space of practices of everyday life.

As Henri Lefebvre notes in the context of his analysis of urban society, this narrative space – what he terms, in this different context, "knowledge" or "theoretical hypothesis" of urban space – "is not necessarily a copy or reflection, a simulacrum or simulation of an object that is *already* real. Nor does it necessarily construct its object for the sake of a theory that predates knowledge, a theory of the object or its 'models'" (*The Urban Revolution* 3). Rather, "the object is included in the hypothesis," in the narrative space, at the same moment at which "the hypothesis comprehends the object. Even though this 'object' is located outside any (empirical) fact, it is not fictional. We can assume existence of a *virtual object*, urban society … whose growth and development can be analyzed in relation to a process and a praxis (practical activity)" (*The Urban Revolution* 3).

The work of Lefebvre, once "the chief theorist of the French Communist Party" who later "turned away from Marxist scientism" (Marcus 134) is here particularly relevant. Not only did

Lefebvre work with the Situationist International to invent a discourse and practices that would be "a rejection of 'boredom' in favor of 'festival'" (134), but his theory also focuses on the importance of urban spaces in the elaborations of this project. "[T]here is a *truth of space*," he writes in his *The Production of Space*, "generated by analysis-followed-by-exposition" which testifies to "the necessity of reversing the dominant trend toward fragmentation, separation and disintegration, a trend subordinated to a centre or to a centralized power and advanced by a knowledge which works as power's proxy" (9). This "problematic of space," furthermore, "subsumes the problems of the urban sphere (the city and its extensions) and of everyday life (programmed consumption)," and it has "displaced the [classic Marxism's] problematic of industrialization" (89). In the present context, this problematic of space is marked precisely by the intersection of narrative(s) space and that of everyday practice(s) through which the city of London as a univocal parallax space emerges. Within this space, "[i]nstead of examining [solely] institutions and classes, structures of economic production and social control" Lefebvre instructs us to "think about 'moments' – moments of love, hate, poetry, frustration, action, surrender, delight, humiliation, justice, cruelty, resignation, surprise, disgust, resentment, self-loathing, pity, fury, peace of mind – those tiny epiphanies … in which the absolute possibilities and temporal [and spatial] limits of anyone's existence [are] revealed" (Marcus 134).

London as the space of parallax is the virtual space of which Lefebvre writes: it is a univocal space that sublates and, hence, maintains its multiplicity in both its narrative and practical aspects. Peter Ackroyd, in his biography of London, notes precisely this seemingly paradoxical characteristic of the city in relation to the sounds and noises (the heteroglossia) it produces and that produce it:

> In 1598 Everard Guilpin wrote a verse satire upon 'the peopled streets' of London, which he depicts as a 'hotch-potch of so many noyses … so many severall voyces.' Here the heterogeneity of London is seen as an aspect of its noise. Yet without the perpetual hum of traffic and machines which seem to characterise the noise of contemporary London streets, individual voices would have been heard more clearly. The wooden and plaster houses on either side of the main thoroughfares acted as an echo-chamber, so that one of the characteristics of the sixteenth-century city would be a continual babble of voices making up one single and insistent conversation; it might be termed the conversation of the city with itself. (73)

Later in the text, apropos various attempts to rationalise the city, to subject it to grids and maps of planners, Ackroyd again notes the city's seemingly paradoxical character, made up of a kind of ever-repeating Deleuzean "folding, unfolding, refolding" (*The Fold* 137), and consequent multiplication, of matter: "It has been said that no stone ever leaves London but is reused and redeployed, adding to that great pile upon which the city rests. The paradox here is of *continual change and constant underlying identity*; it is at the core of the antiquarian passion for a continually altering and expanding city which nevertheless remains an echo chamber for stray memories and unfulfilled desires. … Londoners [continuously and always] hear the voices of all those who came before them in the smallest houses and meanest streets" (119, emphasis added).

Ackroyd represents this multiplication of voices in his novels via various strategies. *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* – a story of Ripper-like murders published in the UK as *The Trials of Elizabeth Cree*, and that opens with the line, "On the 6th of April, 1881, a woman was hanged within the walls of Camberwell Prison" – is structured as an edited text whose various narrative strands, ultimately integrated into the higher unity of the work as a whole, originate

with various sources: certain chapters are written in third person from an external narrative point of view, certain chapters are extracts from (what we later learn is) a forged diary, some chapters are first-person narrations of the protagonist, Elizabeth Cree, and some are court transcripts from her trial. These disparate sources of narrative are never formally integrated: they are simply laid out one next to another.

Alternately, the dual narrative of *Hawksmoor* is further fractured through a recurrent interpolation of 'city voices,' "fragments of popular songs, ballads, and poems … heard in the streets of London in both historical periods … providing an ominous and often uncanny background to the action" (Onega 45)[31]. These multifarious voices and noises produced by the

[31] Here is the opening section of the second chapter, which introduces us to the twentieth century narrative: "AT NOON they were approaching the church in Spitalfields. Their guide had stopped in front of its steps and was calling out, 'Come on! Come on!'. Then she turned to face them, her left eyelid fluttering nervously as she spoke. … 'What was that falling there?', one of the group asked, shielding his eyes with his right hand so that he might look more clearly at the sky around the church tower, but his voice was lost in the traffic noise which had only momentarily subsided: the roar of the lorries as they were driven out of the market in front of the church, and the sound of the drills blasting into the surface of the Commercial Road a little further off, shook the whole area so that it seemed to quiver beneath their feet. … [T]he murmured voices were mixed with words from radio or television, and at the same time various kinds of music seemed to fill the street before ascending into the air above the roofs and chimneys. One song, in particular, could be heard coming from several shops and homes: it soared above the others before it, too, disappeared over the city. 'If we take our stand here and look south,'– and she turned her back on them – 'we will see where the Great Plague spread.' Some children nearby were calling out to each other, so she raised her voice. … 'It has always been a very poor district,' she was saying when a group of four children, whose cries and whistles had already been heard, marched between them. They ignored the strangers and, looking straight ahead, chanted:

> What are you looking for in the hole?
> A stone!
> What will you do with the stone?
> Sharpen a knife!
> What will you do with the knife?
> Cut off your head! …

bodies of the city, by the city itself, are in Ackroyd's text precisely the way in which London – this virtual parallax object – exists as a univocal space within which multiplicity is maintained rather than denied. While fracturing the unity of the narrative through simple multiplication of apparently diverging voices, these "perennially intoned refrains, occasionally background music, proverbs and children's rhymes … travel not only across time, between periods, but also throughout the city of London, to become as much a part of its fabric as the stones of Dyer's churches" (Gibson and Wolfreys 102). These voices, disjoined and multiple as they are, become, like the stones of which the city is built, "reused and redeployed, adding to that great pile upon which the city rests" (Ackroyd, *London* 119).

This notion is further ensconced by the ubiquity of dust in the space of this London: dust that like the Joycean snow is general all over the city[32]. As Jeremy Gibson and Julian Wolfreys write in their study of Ackroyd's work, dust in *Hawksmoor* "becomes a recurrent figure, for the passage of time, and as the undecidable trace across time. … The question of the dust is at once trivial and profoundly disturbing, haunting even … [f]or it is there – and there, and there. Never in the same place or same time twice, it remains as the remains of the past at the very limits of readability and unreadability" (103 – 104). Yet, while Gibson and Wolfreys read this dust as merely gothic, arguing that it is the signifier of "undecidability as signifying trace" which "leads us nowhere" (104), dust – that which hovers between the airy/ethereal and the material – is in

---

And the streets around the Spitalfields church were soon filled with the children who had come tumbling and laughing out of school, shouting out nonsense words to each other until a general cry of 'Join in the ring! Join in the ring!' was taken up" (26 – 28).

[32] For the relationship between Joyce and Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor*, see Morton P. Levitt's "James Joyce in London: Peter Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor*," which argues that among many echoes between Ackroyd's and Joyce's works is the parallel between the union of Dyer and Hawksmoor at the end of Ackroyd's novel and the union between Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom at the end of Joyce's *Ulysses*.

fact the signifier of precisely the univocity of disjunctive synthesis: of that which although it is always different, eternally remains the same. It is, as such, a signifier of the materiality of London.

As Lefebvre aptly notes: "The city creates a situation, the urban situation, where *different* things occur one after another and do not exist separately but according to their differences. The urban … is indifferent to each difference it contains" (*The Urban Revolution* 117). The urban is therefore "an abstraction, but unlike a metaphysical entity, the urban is a concrete abstraction, associated with practice" (118 – 119) and, I would add, with materiality as such:

> Living creatures, the products of industry, technology and wealth, works of culture, ways of living, situations, the modulations and ruptures of the everyday – the urban *accumulates* all content. But it is more than and different than accumulation. Its contents (things, objects, people, situations) are mutually exclusive because they are diverse, but inclusive because they are brought together and imply their mutual presence. The urban is both form and receptacle, void and plenitude, superobject and nonobject, supraconsciousness and the totality of consciousnesses. It is associated with the *logic of form* and with the *dialectic of content*. (119)

London, as this space of parallax that embodies the one and the many, "implies the mobilization of differences in a single movement" (Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* 64): a movement out of which the possibility of change arises, a movement through which the city relates to itself in order to re-form itself. This movement is akin to the grotesque transformations of the body.

Expanding upon Badiou's exposition of the event, according to which it introduces "a cut/rupture in the order of Being on account of which Being can never form a consistent All" (Žižek, *The Parallax View* 167) and according to which "an event is nothing but a part of a given

situation, nothing but a *fragment of being*" (Badiou, qtd. in Žižek, *The Parallax View* 167), Žižek argues that, ultimately, "there is no Beyond of Being which inscribes itself into the order of Being – there is nothing but the order of Being" (167). As he continues,

> Recall the central ontological paradox of Einstein's general theory of relativity, in which matter does not curve space, but is an effect of space's curvature: an Event does not curve the space of Being through its inscription in it – on the contrary, an Event is *nothing but* this curvature of the space of Being. "All there is" is the interstice, the non-self-coincidence, of Being, that is the ontological nonclosure of the order of Being. (167)

This curvature, isomorphic to the "folding, unfolding, [and] refolding" of city-space, is also the way in which the city rewrites itself. The embrace of the parallax gap through an "openness of structure" and through "the open, 'occult' narratives," which Alex Murray writes of in relation to Sinclair's texts, are an acknowledgment of the ontological status of the city-space, of its fundamentally nonclosed order of Being. As such, the texts of Sinclair, Ackroyd, and Moore are "attempt[s] to exorcize the Thatcherite abuse of history from the city by denying the closed narratives that were deployed throughout her rein" (Murray 18). This strategy, as should now be clear, is directly related to punk's proliferation of practices of everyday life which, in many important ways, relied on a utilisation of the grotesque-carnivalesque aesthetic mode.

Back to Jack, or, Sympathy for the Devil

In their texts, then, Sinclair, Ackroyd, and Moore deploy what I earlier termed a grotesque ontology: an ontology via which the city of London – "fleshy and voracious, grown fat upon its appetite for people and for food, for goods and for drink," a "monstrous … labyrinth, half of stone and half of flesh" (Ackroyd, *London* 1 – 2) – is represented/created as a space of

parallax. Sinclair, Ackroyd, and Moore deploy this ontology in order to oppose and discredit the Thatcherite myth of absolute narrative closure and unity, a myth propagated via an extreme version of free-market liberalism embodied by London, "the focal point of [a reimagined and reinvigorated] Victorian culture" (Murray 64), through which the proliferation of practices of everyday life would also be circumscribed. This deployment, however, is only one – positive – side of these authors' exorcism. The other – negative or critical – side rests on representations of Victorian culture through the figure of Jack the Ripper and figures similar to him. These figures are signifiers of strategies of closure: their primary goal is to negate the ontological openness of the city by closing up the (parallax) gap. Their primary goal is to make the gap itself invisible. Paradoxically, this attempt to make the gap invisible is simultaneously an attempt to ensure the dominance of the (rational, seeing) eye/I: as the parallax gap is the product of an openness premised on an existence of a "blind spot" which signifies "the subject's … [inscription] into the perceived object itself" (Žižek, *The Parallax View* 17), the erasure of the parallax gap is the *de facto* institution of the rational seeing subject as the arbiter of reality. The attempt to negate the parallax object is an attempt to create/institute a self-presenting, full, solid, *transparently visible* object[33] in relation to which an individual becomes a rational seeing subject. This, of course, is a necessary precondition for any system of thought according to which there is no society, but only

[33] The idea of a transparently visible object can be traced back to Aristotle, for whom "forms have ontological reality, as much (if not more) than matter. A form is not merely a mental concept, but a *logos en hylê*, an embodied principle, transparently visible and knowable. For Aristotle, nature does not only love to hide, as Heraclitus says; nature loves to see and be seen" (Humphrey 32). Like the Thatcherite attempt to erase the parallax gap, this understanding of *form*, in which Aristotle sees "the essence of each thing and its primary substance" (792 or 1032b1), is premised on a fully-seeing rational subject that can be the agent of a free-market Reaganite/Thatcherite individualism.

"individual men and women" ("Interview") who are solely responsible for their own (economic and moral) wellbeing[34].

There are two primary ways in which this institutionalisation of the rational subject is depicted and critiqued in the works of Sinclair, Ackroyd, and Moore. On the one hand, the rational subject is presented as attempting to rationalize the city itself, to transform it into a legible grid. Here, the individual – Sir Christopher Wren in Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor*, for example, or the detective Nicholas Hawksmoor himself – is seen as a typical bearer of the torch of Enlightenment, a rational subject "suffer[ing] from the barren spiritual state characteristic of the single vision of [empirical] materialism[35]" (Onega 187). On the other hand, the rational subject is presented as Jack the Ripper, an embodiment of surgical precision he practices violently upon the bodies of women who trouble the political order. In this type of subject, rationality loses all restraint and transforms itself into what Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno call "the irrationality of reason" (48), which is "totalitarian" (4) and stands "in the same relationship to things as the dictator to human beings" (6). If we recall Rose's description of the image of Margaret Thatcher as "a woman who stands for a super-rationality [that] writes violence into the

[34] Here is a longer excerpt from this interview Margaret Thatcher gave to Douglas Keay for *Woman's Own* magazine: "I think we have gone through a period when too many children and people have been given to understand 'I have a problem, it is the Government's job to cope with it!' or 'I have a problem, I will go and get a grant to cope with it!'; 'I am homeless, the Government must house me!'; and so they are casting their problems on society and who is society? – There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first. It is our duty to look after ourselves and then also to help look after our neighbour, and life is a reciprocal business and people have got the entitlements too much in mind without the obligations" ("Interview").

[35] This single vision of materialism is an untenable one, for it tries to exclude the "minimum of 'idealism'" necessary for any self-consistent materialism. For more on this, see below and note 37.

law" (15), we can see that Thatcher(ism) embodies both of these kinds of rationality, which presume that materialism, in opposition to its parallax conceptualisation, is "the direct assertion of my inclusion in objective reality … presuppos[ing] that [one's] position of enunciation is that of an external observer who can grasp the whole of reality" (Žižek, *The Parallax View* 17).

The former elaboration of the rational subject (Wren and Hawksmoor) is the simpler of the two and it relies on a construction of a transparently visible, rational (urban) space/object. As representatives of this strategy, Wren in the eighteenth- and Hawksmoor in the twentieth-century narrative of Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor* have faith in empirical and rational procedure: Wren in order to create directly a rational city-space, and Hawksmoor in order to read it, applying traditional detective methods in order to solve an apparently unsolvable crime, a crime inscribed not only on the body of the city, but also on the bodies of its victims (here, we could say, Hawksmoor tries to apply a particular, narrow brand of rationality to the grotesque object). Hawksmoor "liked to consider himself as a scientist, or even as a scholar," writes Ackroyd,

> since it was from close observation and rational deduction that he came to proper understanding of each case. … For he knew that even during extreme events the laws of cause and effect still operated; he could fathom the mind of a murderer, for example, from a close study of the footprints which he left behind – not, it would seem, by any act of sympathy but rather from the principles of reason and of method. (152 – 153)

Similarly, Christopher Wren operates according to principles "of reason and of method": "Of all nations," he tells Dyer who is "a secret Satanist at war with Enlightenment reason" (Link 517), "we were most us'd to order our Affairs by Omens and Praedictions, until we reached this Enlightened Age: for it is now the fittest season for Experiments to arise, to teach us the New Science which springs from Observation and Demonstration and Reason and Method" (145).

The plan the fictional Wren develops for the city of London in Ackroyd's novel is the same the historical Wren developed after the Great Fire of London, the plan which Ackroyd describes in his biography of the city: "Many of these seventeenth-century designs for London incorporated grid systems of intersecting thoroughfares, with great avenues linking majestic public edifices. Wren and [John] Evelyn conceived of a humane and civilised city built upon a preordained pattern, while some of their contemporaries presented mathematically ingenious systems of roads and squares" (115, emphasis added). We can see here how Wren's plans treat the city as a space of great monuments – monuments such as Thatcher's Dick. But, as Ackroyd concludes, "[t]hese noble plans could not work, and they did not work. The very nature of the city defeated them: its ancient foundations lie deeper than the level at which any fire might touch, and the spirit of the place remained unscathed" by these rational plans (115).

Wren and other rational city planners failed to see the urban space not simply because the ancient spirit of the city defied them, but also because they "focus[ed] attentively on the new field, the urban, but … [they saw] it with eyes, with concepts, that were shaped by the practices and theories" not of its time, with tools that were "*reductive* of the emerging [urban] reality" (Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution* 29). From the very beginning, then, Enlightenment-reason and the socio-political reality within which it operated carried within it, in the form of urban space, the ontology of the grotesque that this type of reason failed to see: they carried within it the parallax revealed by the urban yet obscured by the hegemonic principles of reason and method. By trying to see the city as transparently visible, these rational subjects failed to see its reality; rather, they "resist[ed] it, turn[ed] away from it, struggle[ed] against it," and tried to "prevent its birth and development" (Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution* 29). The space of narrative(s) and

everyday practice(s) is precisely that which these city planners tried to resists, struggling against it with an elaboration of a system of great avenues linking majestic public edifices.

Even if not, strictly speaking, grotesque in itself, the parallax is in this context revealed as deeply enmeshed with its operational logic. As I have already discussed, the parallax as revealed by the city of London is a variation of the corporeal-ontological-MULTIPLICITY triad, in which form persists while continually mutating. Because of this, authors such as Ackroyd, Moore, and Sinclair have utilised the human form as shorthand for the urban space, doing so in order to show how the city itself, through the multiplicity of narrative(s) and practice(s) of everyday life of its inhabitants, is a continually mutating organism: a quasi-Deleuzean BwO. London, hence, becomes for Ackroyd "fleshy and voracious," a "monstrous … labyrinth, half of stone and half of flesh" (Ackroyd, *London* 1 – 2); Sinclair's characters walk "through the secret intestines" of London (13), facing "the excitement of the city's unskinned heart" (110) and sketching its "black contours, rib and vein, the heart's heart, the labyrinth of the secret city, the temperature-graph of the dying stones" (103); and in *From Hell*, right after Queen Victoria has charged him with dispatching the prostitutes who know of Prince Albert's illegitimate child with one of them, Gull and his coachman aspire to, in Gull's words, "probe the ventricles of London, England's heart" (iv, 9), where "[o]ur story's written," "inked in blood long dry," and engraved in stone" (iv, 37 – 38). London is here caught up in the logic of the grotesque (human) body deployed by this aesthetic form, which marks the city as a space of parallax.

As in the case of Wren and other urban planers who tried to see London as transparently visible, Hawksmoor, Ackroyd's text's detective, tries to understand the crimes he is attempting to solve by ignoring the parallax nature of their urban setting, and seeing them as transparently visible acts, susceptible to rational and methodical modes of investigation. His inability to

penetrate the mystery of the crimes, however, persuades him that he must forsake the purely empirical and rational, that he must "give[ ] up on reasoning" in order to "construct[ ] an order that may be irrational but in spite of that gives him a grip on events" (Fokkema 172). By the end of the novel, he must merge with the signifier of the irrational – the criminal Nicholas Dyer – in order for them to speak "with one voice":

> and I must have slept, for all these figures greeted me as if they were in a dream. The light behind them effaced their features and I could see only the way they turned their heads, both to left and to right. The dust covered their feet and I could see only the direction of their dance, both backwards and forwards. And when I went among them, they touched fingers and formed a circle around me; and, as we came closer, all the while we moved further apart. Their words were my own but not my own, and I found myself on a winding path of smooth stones. And when I looked back, they were watching one another silently.
>
> And then in my dream I looked down at myself and saw in what rags I stood; and I am a child again, begging on the threshold of eternity. (217)

Even though this merging of the two figures – of the irrational[36] and the rational signifiers from which emerges an all-encompassing "eternal" perspective – is presented in a ghostly, ethereal form, as gothic, its mode is very much that of the grotesque-material: it is premised on the polyphonic univocity (disjunctive synthesis of bodies and of buildings) while, simultaneously, enacting the "minimum of 'idealism'" necessary for a consistent materialism, a materialism that

[36] This 'irrationality,' as we will soon see, is actually nothing but an irrationality of reason.

is not limited by a "single vision" and that is necessary to define "the notion of Self[hood]" that emerges from the parallax[37] (Žižek, *The Parallax View* 205 – 206).

The figure of Jack the Ripper signifies the second elaboration of the rational subject – and Elizabeth Cree, the murderess of Ackroyd's *Dan Leno*, and even Nicholas Dyer of his *Hawksmoor* are only variations of the Jack the Ripper archetype. This rational subject is the

[37] "[T]he only way to account for the emergence of the distinction between the 'inside' and 'outside' constitutive of a living organism is to posit a kind of self-reflexive reversal by means of which – to put it in Hegelese – the One of an organism as a Whole retroactively 'posits' as its result, as that which it dominates and regulates, the set of its own causes (that is, the very multiple process out of which it emerged). In this way – and only in this way – an organism is no longer limited by external conditions, but is fundamentally self-limited – again, as Hegel would have articulated it, life emerges when the external limitation (of an entity by its environs) turns into self-limitation. This brings us back to the problem of infinity: for Hegel, true infinity does not stand for limitless expansion, but for active self-limitation (self-determination) in contrast to being-determined-by-the-other. In this precise sense, life (even at its most elementary: as a living cell) is the basic form of true infinity, since it already involves the minimal loop by means of which a process is no longer simply determined by the Outside of its environs, but is itself able to (over)determine the mode of this determination and thus 'posits its presuppositions.' Infinity acquires its first actual existence the moment a cell's membrane starts to functions as a self-boundary. … The further key fact is that we thus obtain a minimum of ideality. A property emerges which is purely virtual and relational, with no substantial identity" (Žižek, *The Parallax View* 205).

Also, "Here we encounter the minimum of 'idealism' that defines the notion of Self. A Self is precisely an entity without any substantial density, without any hard kernel that would guarantee its consistency. If we penetrate the surface of an organism and look deeper and deeper into it, we never encounter some central controlling element that would be its Self, secretly pulling the strings of its organs. The consistency of the Self is thus purely virtual; it is as if it were an Inside that appears only when viewed from the Outside, on the interface-screen – the moment we penetrate the interface and endeavor to grasp the Self 'substantially,' as it is 'in itself,' it disappears like sand between our fingers. Thus materialist reductionists who claim that 'there really is no self' are right, but they nonetheless miss the point. At the level of material reality (inclusive of the psychological reality of 'inner experience'), there effectively is no Self. The Self is not the 'inner kernel' of an organism but a surface-effect. … Hegel's thesis that 'subject is not a substance' has thus to be taken quite literally: in the opposition between the corporeal-material process and the pure 'sterile' appearance, subject is appearance itself, brought to its self-reflection; it is *something that exists only insofar as it appears to itself*" (206). I will explore this in more detail in Chapter 4.

representative of "the irrationality of reason" described by Horkheimer and Adorno: "In the service of an advancing rationalization of instrumental thought modeled on the domination of nature and serving its purposes, enlightened reason is progressively hollowed out until it reverts to the new mythology of a resurrected relationship to nature, to violence" (218). By subjecting everything to reason, "making the same" everything that "might be different," and by instituting the principle of exchange through which all things can be made equivalent, the rational subject enacts "one of the primal images of mythical violence: [he] amputates the incommensurable" (8 – 9)[38], in this case represented by Thatcher's folk-demons. This also, according to Horkheimer

[38] Here is the entire passage from which this extract is taken in which Horkheimer and Adorno discuss the relationship between myth and Enlightenment rationality: "As a totality set out in language and laying claim to a truth which suppressed the older mythical faith of popular religion, the solar, patriarchal myth was itself an enlightenment, fully comparable on that level to the philosophical one. But now it paid the price. Mythology itself set in motion the endless process of enlightenment by which, with ineluctable necessity, every definite theoretical view is subjected to the annihilating criticism that it is only a belief, until even the concepts of mind, truth, and, indeed, enlightenment itself have been reduced to animistic magic. The principle of the fated necessity which caused the downfall of the mythical hero, and finally evolved as the logical conclusion from the oracular utterance, not only predominates, refined to the cogency of formal logic, in every rationalistic system of Western philosophy but also presides over the succession of systems which begins with the hierarchy of the gods and, in a permanent twilight of the idols, hands down a single identical content: wrath against those of insufficient righteousness. Just as myths already entail enlightenment, with every step enlightenment entangles itself more deeply in mythology. Receiving all its subject matter from myths, in order to destroy them, it falls as judge under the spell of myth. It seeks to escape the trial of fate and retribution by itself exacting retribution on that trial. In myths, everything that happens must atone for the fact of having happened. It is no different in enlightenment: no sooner has a fact been established than it is rendered insignificant. The doctrine that action equals reaction continued to maintain the power of repetition over existence long after humankind had shed the illusion that, by repetition, it could identify itself with repeated existence and so escape its power. But the more the illusion of magic vanishes, the more implacably repetition, in the guise of regularity, imprisons human beings in the cycle now objectified in the laws of nature, to which they believe they owe their security as free subjects. The principle of immanence, the explanation of every event as repetition, which enlightenment upholds against mythical imagination, is that of myth itself. The arid wisdom which acknowledges nothing new under the sun, because all the pieces in the meaningless game have

and Adorno, creates a "distance between subject … [and] object, … founded on the distance from things which the ruler attains by means of the ruled" (9). William Gull, "describing his deeds as an attempt to suppress the so-called instinctive and irrational … to yoke and control the Dionysiac, 'female' powers of the unconscious through subjection to Apollonian forces of reason" (Carney) is this irrationally rational subject. Furthermore, this subject is, through his very act of violence, "the Thatcherite poster child for the 'free-born Englishman'" (Ho 107) and a perverse

---

been played out, all the great thoughts have been thought, all possible discoveries can be construed in advance, and human beings are defined by self- preservation through adaptation – this barren wisdom merely reproduces the fantastic doctrine it rejects: the sanction of fate which, through retribution, incessantly reinstates what always was. Whatever might be different is made the same. That is the verdict which critically sets the boundaries to possible experience. The identity of everything with everything is bought at the cost that nothing can at the same time be identical to itself. Enlightenment dissolves away the injustice of the old inequality of unmediated mastery, but at the same time perpetuates it in universal mediation, by relating every existing thing to every other. It brings about the situation for which Kierkegaard praised his Protestant ethic and which, in the legend-cycle of Hercules, constitutes one of the primal images of mythical violence: it amputates the incommensurable. Not merely are qualities dissolved in thought, but human beings are forced into real conformity. The blessing that the market does not ask about birth is paid for in the exchange society by the fact that the possibilities conferred by birth are molded to fit the production of goods that can be bought on the market. Each human being has been endowed with a self of his or her own, different from all others, so that it could all the more surely be made the same. But because that self never quite fitted the mold, enlightenment throughout the liberalistic period has always sympathized with social coercion. The unity of the manipulated collective consists in the negation of each individual and in the scorn poured on the type of society which could make people into individuals. The horde, a term which doubtless is to be found in the Hitler Youth organization, is not a relapse into the old barbarism but the triumph of repressive *égalité*, the degeneration of the equality of rights into the wrong inflicted by equals. The fake myth of fascism reveals itself as the genuine myth of prehistory, in that the genuine myth beheld retribution while the false one wreaks it blindly on its victims. Any attempt to break the compulsion of nature by breaking nature only succumbs more deeply to that compulsion. That has been the trajectory of European civilization. Abstraction, the instrument of enlightenment, stands in the same relationship to its objects as fate, whose concept it eradicates: as liquidation. Under the leveling rule of abstraction, which makes everything in nature repeatable, and of industry, for which abstraction prepared the way, the liberated finally themselves become the "herd" (*Trupp*), which Hegel identified as the outcome of enlightenment (7 – 9).

model for "born again radical individuation" proscribed by Thatcherism's take on "Victorian Values" (Samuel, qtd. in Ho 107): he is the subject who tries to write violence into the law.

Figure 8: "The Pasteboard Queen"

In Moore's and Sinclair's versions of the Ripper mythos, the Ripper murders are initiated by Queen Victoria's attempt to protect the monarchy from scandal[39]: "Campbell's portraits of

[39] Both *WCST* and *From Hell* are, as I noted earlier, based on Stephen Knight's 1976 book *Jack the Ripper: The Final Solution* which proposes the (now discredited) theory that Jack the Ripper was William Gull, one of the physicians to Queen Victoria, whom the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* describes as "an exact clinical physician, whose success was based on acute observation, a retentive memory, minute scrutiny of all the facts, and an immense capacity for work." He "came to public notice in 1871 when he attended the prince of Wales during his severe illness with typhoid fever. He was knighted in January 1872 and was created a baronet in February of the same year" (Hervey). Here is how Elizabeth Ho summarizes the plot of Moore's

Victoria show her as a pasteboard queen [Figure 8] ordering the deaths of the 'four whores of the apocalypse;'" and "What better model for Thatcher's England," asks Elizabeth Ho, "than an adventure in the East End in the twilight of Empire in which an old boys' club's primary goal is to protect its own and its iconic mother figure?" (103). Beyond this attempt to protect its own, the 1888 murders of Mary Ann Nichols (August 31), Annie Chapman (September 8), Elizabeth Stride (September 30), Catherine Eddowes (September 30), and Mary Jane Kelly (November 9) are, in Moore's and Sinclair's stories, an attempt to maintain the narrative of self-consistent and opaque power of the monarchy in general and Queen Victoria in particular, which strictly parallels Thatcher(ism)'s attempts to eliminate its various folk-demons.

The act of mixing with mere mortals committed by Prince Albert is, then, an act of betrayal: it destabilizes by making permeable the strict boundary between the subject of power (monarchy, Victoria) and its objects (the people). As Žižek points out, the literal body of the monarch, even though it cannot be dismissed as "a simple 'fetishist misperception,'" is "the ridiculous/excessive/excremental object, tic," that protrudes from the "big Other (the formal order, ultimately an empty place)" (*The Parallax View* 108). "[O]f course a king [or queen] is 'in himself' a miserable individual," he continues, "of course he is a king only insofar as subjects

---

text: "Moore's exhaustive text, illustrated in stark black and white by Eddie Campbell, shares an interest in Stephen Knight's book *Jack the Ripper: The Final Solution,* which advanced the theory of a vast conspiracy connecting the figures of the Duke of Clarence; Walter Sickert, the painter; Royal Physician in Extraordinary Dr. William Withey Gull; and his hapless coachman and accomplice, Netley. *From Hell* settles on Gull as the sole killer, acting on orders from Queen Victoria to quietly but effectively deal with the scandal of Prince Eddy's secret marriage to Annie Crook, a Catholic sweet-shop girl with whom he had fathered a daughter. The five Ripper victims, in Moore's version, were not random but a systematic elimination of Annie's unfortunate friends attempting to blackmail the Crown for the measly sum of £10. The entire affair, botched by Gull's increasing insanity, was subsequently hushed up by the Masonic brotherhood. Evidence was erased, witnesses silenced, and eventually an aging Gull was bundled off to an asylum while the Whitechapel murders were blamed on the melancholic schoolmaster Montague Druitt" (102 – 103).

treat him like one; the point, however, is that the 'fetishist illusion' which sustains our veneration of a king has in itself a performative dimension – *the very unity of our state, that which the king 'embodies,' actualizes itself only in the person of a king*. … [W]hat the king stands for is embodied only in his person" (108). It is, therefore, not just her symbolic status that Queen Victoria is protecting: the banal, common relationship between Prince Eddy and Annie Crook – and this relationship in Moore's text is presented in banal and ridiculous, if sincere and loving, terms [Figure 9] – threatens to expose the monarchy as precisely the ridiculous, excessive, and excremental object of which Žižek writes. The murders of the five women by the Queen's physician are, then, a kind of act of Divine retribution performed in order to maintain "a fixed socioethical frame of reference" (Žižek, *The Parallax View* 126) consecrated through the body of the Queen.

Figure 9: Eddy and Annie

Within the context of Thatcher's UK, this is a trenchant critique of the kind of power embodied by the figure of the Prime Minister. As in the Yorkville example, briefly outlined above, Moore (and Ackroyd and Sinclair) draws our attention to the parallels between the kinds of power that exist within and exploit urban space (in this case, that of London). Masculine

violence enacted upon women's bodies here meets the political power wielded by Maggie Regina, so that *Spitting Image*'s portrayal of Thatcher as "a mad butcher engaged in slaughtering with a cleaver the queues of jobless" (Meinhof and Smith 45) takes on an added significance. Thatcherism's onslaught upon the folk demons is here simply an echo of the more explicit violence enacted by Jack the Ripper in the service of the fearsome figure of Queen Victoria.

The act of betrayal by Prince Albert – the act that ruptures the boundary between the realm of power and the realm of its objects (or subjects) – reveals, aside from the monarch's status as the excremental object, the void within the structure of symbolic power around which multiple narratives and practices are allowed to circulate. This revelation creates a kind of "uncertainty," as well as a

> lack of a fixed socioethical frame of reference, [which] far from simply condemning us to moral relativism, opens up a new "higher" field of ethical experience, that of inter-subjectivity, of the mutual dependence of subjects, of the need not only to rely on others, but also to recognize the ethical weight of others' claims on me. Ethics as a system of norms is thus not simply given, it is itself the result of the ethical *work* of "mediation," of me recognizing the legitimacy of others' claims on me. That is to say: in the Hegelian passage from Substance to Subject, the substance (for example, at the social level, the ethical substance, the mores that sustain a way of life) does not disappear, it is just that its status changes: the substance loses its substantial character, it is no longer experienced as a firm foundation given in advance but as a fragile symbolic fiction, something which exists only insofar as individuals treat it as existing, or only insofar as they relate to it as their ethical substance. There is no directly existing "ethical substance," the only

> "actually existing" thing is the incessant activity and interaction of individuals, and it is only this activity that keeps it alive. (Žižek, *Parallax* 126 – 127)

In other words, once the head of state (King, Queen, Prime Minister) is shown to be simply a ridiculous, excremental object used to plug the parallax gap in order to present *a* space of narrative(s) and practice(s) of everyday life as *the* space of social fact, all that is left is the multiplicity of narrative(s) and practice(s) collected univocally in spaces such as London. This means that grotesque mixings – such as those elaborated by punk and its subjects/folk-demons – are, as incessant activity and interaction of individuals, the only actually existing things in the social sphere. And this is precisely what the act of negation that refuses social facts as facts reveals: the big Other as an empty space around which narratives and practices are arranged and structured. This also means that the body of the figurehead and the body of the urban space are isomorphic: they perform the same function in that they allow for an actualisation of various narrative and practical spaces. But while the body of the King has historically been stabilizing in such a way that it sought for ways of eliminating contradictions, the urban space is stabilizing as an instantiation of what we have here called grotesque ontology: a continually mutating structure which, nevertheless, allows for form to persists via the logic of disjunctive synthesis – or, in other words, "the urban [space which] *accumulates* all content" (Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution* 119).

As Žižek further elaborates on this ethical position disclosed by the revelation of the parallax:

> There is a saying that some things can be found only if, before finding them, one gets lost – does this properly Hegelian paradox not provide the formula of the … search for the ethical position? It can be "found," formulated, only after one gets lost – only after one

> accepts that there is no given ethical substance which provides the fixed coordinates for our ethical judgment in advance, that such a judgment can emerge only from our own work of ethical reflection with no external guarantee. It is not that we are dealing here with the simple "Hegelian" movement into alienation (getting lost) and recuperation of oneself (finding a firm position); the point is a more precise one: it is the very movement of "getting lost" (of losing ethical substance) that opens up the space for the ethical work of mediation which alone can generate the solution. The loss is thus not recuperated but fully asserted as liberating, as a positive opening. (127)

The positive opening asserted by the loss of ethical substance (the Queen as the sublime rather than a ridiculous, grotesque object/substance) is the opening of the parallax gap. Like the pieces of a shuffle-puzzle, the object of power (represented in Moore's and Sinclair's texts by the excremental object *par excellence*: the prostitute) is by Prince Albert's betrayal transformed (in the eyes of power, at least) into a subject which can circulate around an empty space of power (from which, admittedly, still protrudes that other excremental object, the Queen, which, however, cannot stop the shuffling of the pieces). Furthermore, through this evacuation of power, London – the seat of the monarchy – is shown to be the space of the parallax gap.

The ritual and excessive murders of Jack the Ripper reveal this metonymic equation between the seat of the monarchy (London) and its power. Early in *Dan Leno*, in the description of the first murder committed by the "Limehouse Golem," Ackroyd points to the crucial aspect of the murders: the attempt to use the bodies – and body parts – of the victims to merge them with the brick structures of the city:

> The first killing occurred on the 10th September, 1880, along Limehouse Reach … an ancient lane which led from a small thorough-fare of mean houses to a flight of stone

> steps just above the bank of the Thames. … It reeked of dampness … but it also possessed a stranger and more fugitive odour which was aptly described … as that of 'dead feet.' It was here … that the body of Jane Quig was discovered. She had been left upon the old steps in three separate parts; her head was upon the upper step, with her torso arranged beneath it in some parody of the human form, while certain of her internal organs had been impaled upon a wooden post by the riverside. (4 – 5)

Similarly, the London of Sinclair's *WCST* is de-marked by Gull's victims: "The zone was gradually defined, the labyrinth penetrated. It was given limits by the victims of the Ripper" (27). These attempts to fuse the bodies of the victims with the body of the city are rituals performed to close the gap opened up by Edward's betrayal. The city must remain a rationally organized object, and the Queen must remain the self-consistent opaque subject (and substance) of power so that the "fixed socioethical frame of reference" is left intact. Not only is this meant to guarantee the continuation of a consistent form of power as that which provides fixed coordinates for our ethical judgment, it is also meant to prevent a proliferation of narratives and practices of everyday life that could disrupt this form of power, prevent it from functioning smoothly – the way, for example, striking miners, teachers, prostitutes, and other folk demons posed a threat to the smooth functioning of Thatcherism.

The legibility of London explored in the fourth chapter of Moore's *From Hell*, which opens with the conversation between Gull and Queen Victoria [Figure 10] during which he is dispatched to "be about [his] work" (iv, 3), is premised on an ability to map the city, to render it legible through a complex

Figure 10: Victoria's Gull

interplay of "symbol, history and myth" (iv, 6) which allow for the dominance of a particular brand of male rationality that strictly parallels the Wren-and-Hawksmoor-like rationality depicted in *Hawksmoor*: "Measured against the span of Goddesses," Gull explains to his coachman Netley, "our male rebellion's lately won, our new regime or rationality unfledged, precarious. Our grand symbolic magic chaining womankind thus must often be reinforced, carved deeper yet in History's flesh, enduring 'til the Earth's demise when this world and its sisters shall be swallowed by a Father Sun grown red and bloated as a leech" (iv, 25). Drawing a pentagram upon a map of London by joining various momentous edifices of London he and Netley had visited, Gull concludes: "It SURROUNDS us… This pentacle of Sun Gods, obelisks and rational male fire, wherein unconsciousness, the Moon and Womanhood are chained. Its lines of power and meaning must be reinforced, according to the ancient ways… What BETTER sacrifice than 'Heiros Gamos'? Than Diana's priestesses?" (iv, 37).

Gull's reading of London and Ripper's subsequent murders, by embedding the victims' bodies into the geography of the city, aim to preserve the "rightful masculine ownership" (Ho 114) of the seat of the monarchy (weilded, paradoxically at least on the surface, by a woman). As Alex Link points out, this strategy of merging the body of the city with the body of the female victims, although presented in mystical terms, is united with a particular brand of rationality as "a response to [the] abject [and grotesque] excess[es]" of parallax. As he writes in relation to Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor*:

> Dyer's churches, which organize London's "Monstrous, Straggling and out of all Shape … Carcasse" (48); Wren's rationalism, which organizes female carcasses through autopsy; and Hawksmoor's doomed criminal investigation, which must force itself "to assume there is a story" (125) in order to accomplish the narrative arrangement of

> carcasses into meaning are … united as responses to abject excess. The management of the body of the city, and writing the urban body, come together in the dynamic of abjection that governs the coroner's dissecting table. If the "corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection" (Kristeva 4), *Hawksmoor*'s two autopsies illustrate the complicity of "God" and "science" in placing the abject even as they oppose one another. (524 – 525)

What Link, via Kristeva, calls the abject is, in the present context, the grotesque body outside of "a fixed socioethical frame of reference," a frame traditionally provided by those who would write violence into the law. Dr. Gull/Ripper's excessive retribution, then, attempts to reinsert the woman's abject/folk demon body into this frame of reference; and it tries to do so by making the body of the victim and the body of the city one: a closed One that prevents the circulation of narratives and everyday practices. It attempts to close the gap that signals the ontological openness of London by literally stuffing it with mutilated bodies of 'fallen' women.

Of course, this strategy is bound to fail. Indeed, the intensification of violence which signals the intensification of the Queen's exercise of authority only works toward further revealing the void at the centre of symbolic power – toward a multiplication of narratives and everyday practices. Once Gull/Ripper is set loose within the space of London, even the Queen is unable to control him. He becomes a (negative) force that generates narrative – as we can today see in the example of the Ripper mythos itself and its embrace by punk. And even though the veracity of the Ripper narrative(s) and the monarchy's implication in the ritual murder of five prostitutes in London in 1888 is, at best, doubtful, the very force of the narrative the Ripper launches must return to the past in order to implicate the seat of power: it must reach back directly to Queen Victoria, that excremental object protruding from the empty space of symbolic

power. Like Sinclair in and through his novel, the narrative itself must "write … [its] way back toward [that] moment. This is given" (*WCST* 192). As historical materialists, our "children will climb up onto that wreck, will stand at that rudder. And the connection will be made, the circuit completed" (193) – with or without the cooperation of verified History.

Similarly, Thatcher's deployment of the "Victorian Values" narrative was destined to multiply itself in spite of her effort to provide it with a closed and circumscribed set of values. As Sinclair notes, "She opened herself up to the darkest demons of world politics, and therefore writers were obliged to counter this by equally extraordinary projects" (qtd. in Murray 10). These projects were based on an attempt to reveal the fundamentally open character of the city of London, a glimpse of which was briefly provided by punk. These projects were based on an attempt to reveal the (ontologically grotesque) parallax gap and the multiple narratives and practices that produce it.

The attempt to stop the gap never works. This is why Mary Jane Kelly, Ripper's final intended victim, must survive his machinations. Her depiction as alive in "Ireland somewhere in 1904? 1905?" at the end of Moore's text (xiv, 23) is, therefore, not a romantic vision of an overly optimistic author. It is an absolute necessity, produced by the narrative of London, by London itself, by the narrative and the city which embody the fundamental non-closure of the order of Being which, sooner or later, must produce a fragment capable of unleashing the forces of the New: Punk; Iain Sinclair; Alan Moore; Peter Ackroyd; the Poll Tax Riots; and other equally extraordinary projects.

CHAPTER THREE

The Transcendental Adrenochrome[1]: Figuring the Unfigurable in Oscar Zeta Acosta (and Hunter S. Thompson)

The Promise

The grotesque body figures the non-rabbit[2]. The non-rabbit is unfigurable.

The body de-formed is a constant, symbolising continuous variation. It is what we can, following Deleuze's study of Francis Bacon, call meat. It is, again, quantitative multiplicity or matter as corporeal, and qualitative multiplicity or "pre-individual and impersonal singularities" (Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* 297) emanating from the corporeal yet transcending it as forces of matter acting upon itself – as ontological. The body de-formed here operates according to the logic of Multiplicity explored in the previous two chapters. This logic stitches the corporeal to the ontological and it is univocal: it is "a single 'voice' of Being" which is "said in a single and same sense of everything of which it is said, but that of which it is said differs: it is said of difference itself" (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 36). As an unchanging exception to the rule, the body de-formed evokes the Law that is "essential to the determination of the virtualities

[1] Ray Brassier, in his doctoral thesis entitled "Alien Theory: The Decline of Materialism in the Name of Matter" upon which I will draw substantially in this chapter, appropriates Hunter S. Thompson's use of 'adrenochrome' in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* to speak of his theory of non-materialism as a transcendental adenochrome, "able to reconfigure the parameters of perception in so drastic a fashion as to allow for the apprehension of" theoretical phenomena that are "unenvisageable, unfigurable yet radically immanent" (190). He cites Thompson's text, in which adrenochrome is a "mythical hallucinogen, or reputedly terrifying potency, supposedly synthesized from the living body's pituitary gland" (190 n. 266).

[2] See Brassier, "Alien Theory" 165ff.

through which the variation passes," the Law that is itself "optionally chosen" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* [*ATP*] 100). Of course, as Deleuze and Guattari also note, "constants are drawn from the variables themselves. … *Constant is not opposed to variable*; it is a treatment of the variable opposed to the other kind of treatment, or continuous variation" (103). The specifically grotesque continuous variation is, unlike the Deleuze-Guattarian, however, always stitched to structure – even if it is continuously deformed, the structure necessarily persists. The structure is here plastic.

The body disarticulated is, hence, that which points back; it is that which makes looking back, to the Symbolic rule (as that which preserves structure), possible. As Ralf Remshardt notes, the "deformed body is always doubled by the body intact" (261). It, thus, both figures/ delineates and transforms the rule – the Law – out of which it materialises[3]: "[I]t is like a flash of lightning in the night which, from the beginning of time, gives a dense and black intensity to the night it denies; which lights up the night from the inside, from top to bottom, and yet owes to the dark the stark clarity of its manifestation, its harrowing and poised singularity. The flash loses itself in this space it marks with its sovereignty and becomes silent now that it has given a name to obscurity" (Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression" 74).

The body distended is a diagram; it is diagrammatic. As such it is Decisional and caught up in an organization of forms of contents and forms of expressions (Deleuze and Guattari, *ATP* 141 – 142, 144). As diagrammatic, it also "modulates a theory" (Mullarkey 174): "neither wholly iconic nor symbolic," it "instantiate[s] that which [it] supposedly look[s] like or symbolise[s]" (174). It is thus (at least) dually functional or *performative*: in that it lays out the play between the virtual and the actual, and in that it instantiates a *productive dead end for*

[3] Remember here how a text's grotesque moments transform the text out of which they emerge – an idea discussed in the first chapter in relation to Tarantino and Kane.

thought by naming matter-in-itself as Real. This productive dead end opens the space of the "passion for the [R]eal" (Badiou, *The Century* 48ff) which is one of the two productive dead ends of contemporary theory, the other being Derrida's notion of writing.

As caught up in an organization of forms of contents and forms of expressions, the body distended is the knot that ties together the metaphysical and the epistemological – information and knowledge – without which "metaphysics is empty and … epistemology is blind" (Brassier, "Concepts and Objects" 49).

And it is also, finally, that which points 'out,' toward the *radically immanent* matter 'itself,' matter given-without-givenness, the thing-in-itself as distinguished from matter 'as such.' It is that which points toward what Ray Brassier, following François Laruelle, calls "non-Decisional theory for Decision" ("Alien Theory" 6)[4]. Not only does, then, the grotesque body evoke the blind spot of Žižekian materialism, a blind spot that participates in the production of the materialist parallax gap discussed in the preceding chapter, but it also evokes the "axiomatically determined … *hole in nothingness itself, not just in being,*" a "blind spot for philosophical auto-reflection" revealed by non-philosophy's "identity-in-person, the One in flesh and blood which does not tolerate either internal transcendence or external, operational transcendence" (Laruelle 174 – 75). This is a revelation of matter as what Quentin Meillassoux calls "arche-fossil" or "fossil-matter," as *an index of an ancestral reality* defined as "anterior to every form of human relation to the world" (Meillassoux 10).

With this chapter, then, we finally reach the ultimate cause of grotesque's ability to provoke *anxiety*, the affective knot that brings together the responses of horror/disgust and

[4] For a brief, general outline of Laruelle's critique and use of Decisionism, see note 28 of the introduction. Much of my discussion in this chapter will follow and try to elucidate this process – of extracting a "non-Decisional theory for Decision" – via Acosta's and Thompson's grotesque texts.

laughter. This cause is nothing else but the grotesque-image's fundamental nullification, or erasure, of the human horizon.

Contemporary Dead Ends

The two novels of Oscar Zeta Acosta (1935 – 1974) – *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* (*The Autobiography*, 1972) and *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* (*The Revolt*, 1973) – form a quasi-continuous autobiographical narrative[5] that is, in terms of its use of the grotesque (body), divided by what Hunter S. Thompson described as the breaking and rolling back of "a high and beautiful wave" (*Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* [*FLLV*, 1971] 68) – a wave that peaked in "San Francisco in the middle sixties" and which, until then, spread "madness in any direction, at any hour" along with "a fantastic universal sense that whatever we were doing was *right*, that we were winning" (67 – 68).

This wave symbolises the western world's progressive political optimism of the 1960s embodied by, among other events, the May '68 protests in Paris and elsewhere in France, and by various events throughout the 1960s US: the election of John F. Kennedy (1961), the Great March on Washington (1963), the passage of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts (1964 and

[5] A number of critics note the quasi-continuous nature of Acosta's narratives by referring to the 'characters' in the two fictionalized autobiographies by different names: "I will refer to the protagonist of *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* as Oscar, Buffalo Zeta Brown [of *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*] as Brown, and the historical person and author as Acosta," writes Micheal Hames Garcia, for example (467). Highlighting the continuity of the two texts, on the other hand, Bruce-Novoa refers to the historical personage as Acosta, and to the character of the two novels as Oscar. Acosta himself, as author, highlights this quasi-continuous nature of the narrative by having the protagonist of the texts change his name: at the end of *The Autobiography*, he adopts the name Zeta – the last lines of the novel are "… and some time later I would become Zeta, the world-famous Chicano lawyer who helped to start the last revolution – but that, as old Doc Jennings would say, is another story" (199); and in *The Revolt* he goes by the "new name," Buffalo Zeta Brown (37).

1965), and Woodstock (1969), the sixties' generation's last loud desperate gasp. This political and cultural revolutionary *zeitgeist* – with which the Situationist International, briefly discussed in the previous chapter, was associated in France through various projects and slogans such as "Neither Gods nor Masters" and "Those who talk about revolution and class struggle without referring to everyday reality have a corpse in their mouth" [Figure 1] – "supplemented the traditional critique of socioeconomic exploitation with a new cultural critique: alienation of everyday life, commodification of consumption, inauthenticity of a mass society in which we 'wear masks' and suffer sexual and other oppressions" (Žižek, "The Ambiguous Legacy"). It also, especially in the US, made great leaps toward fulfilling the promise of this country's founding document, the Declaration of Independence, which asserted the truths that "all men [and women] are created equal" and have "certain unalienable Rights" among which are "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness," further asserting that any "Form of Government [that] becomes destructive of these ends" is rightfully "alter[ed]" and "abolish[ed]" by the People, who are then free to "institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness" ("Declaration").

REVOLUTION CEASES TO BE THE MOMENT IT BECOMES NECESSARY TO BE SACRIFICED FOR IT IT IS FORBIDDEN TO FORBID NEITHER GODS NOR MASTERS DOWN WITH THE ABSTRACT, LONG LIVE THE EPHEMERAL AFTER GOD, ART IS DEAD DOWN WITH A WORLD WHERE THE GUARANTEE THAT WE WON'T DIE OF STARVATION HAS BEEN PURCHASED WITH THE GUARANTEE THAT WE WILL DIE OF BOREDOM CLUB MED, A CHEAP HOLIDAY IN OTHER PEOPLE'S MISERY DON'T CHANGE EMPLOYERS, CHANGE THE EMPLOYMENT OF LIFE NEVER WORK CHANCE MUST BE SYSTEMATICALLY EXPLORED RUN, COMRADE, THE OLD WORLD IS BEHIND YOU BE CRUEL THE MORE YOU CONSUME THE LESS YOU LIVE LIVE WITHOUT DEAD TIME, INDULGE UNTRAMMELED DESIRE PEOPLE WHO TALK ABOUT REVOLUTION AND CLASS STRUGGLE WITHOUT REFERRING EXPLICITLY TO EVERYDAY LIFE, WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING WHAT IS SUBVERSIVE ABOUT LOVE AND POSITIVE ABOUT THE REFUSAL OF CONSTRAINTS, HAVE CORPSES IN THEIR MOUTHS UNDER THE PAVING STONES, THE BEACH!

Figure 1: May '68 Slogans (Marcus 29)

In both the private and the public realms, the generation that reached maturity in the 1960s US "faced novelty, uncertainty, and opportunity as had no previous generation" (Unger and Unger 1). All sources of authority were "delegitimized," note Debi and Irwin Unger, and "all hierarchical structures became more pliant" while the "decade … witnessed the 'liberation' of whole categories of people who had previously been penalized for their race, age, physical fitness, gender, or sexual preference" (1). Because of this, writes Hunter S. Thompson of the sixties, "no explanation, no mix of words or music or memories can touch that sense of knowing that you were there and alive in that corner of time and the world" (*FLLV* 66 – 67). Continuing, Thompson comes close to describing this historical period in terms of a Badiouian event: "[E]very now and then the energy of a whole generation comes to a head in a long fine flash, for reasons that nobody really understands at the time – and which never explain, in retrospect, what actually happened" (67).

During 1968, however, this high and beautiful wave of optimism "finally broke and rolled back" (Thompson, *FLLV* 68). In France, even though "the students attracted sympathy," the elections of June 1968 were won by the party of General Charles de Gaulle, which was returned with a stronger mandate than before. This showed, at best, that "French society was completely divided" (Badiou, "'Always keep an eye on Québec'") and was followed by a dissipation of revolutionary energies. Moreover, the language deployed by the Situationists and the student protestors in Paris was seized and redeployed by new capitalism, which "present[ed] itself as a successful libertarian revolt against the oppressive social organizations of corporate capitalism and 'really existing' socialism" (Žižek, "The Ambiguous Legacy"). "What survived of the sexual liberation of the '60s," Žižek continues,

> was the tolerant hedonism readily incorporated into our hegemonic ideology. Today, [in the world living the legacy of '68] sexual enjoyment is not only permitted, it is ordained – individuals feel guilty if they are not able to enjoy it. The drive to radical forms of enjoyment (through sexual experiments and drugs or other trance-inducing means) arose at a precise political moment: when "the spirit of '68" had exhausted its political potential[6].

In the year 1968, then, we see the beginnings of capitalism's carnivalisation of everyday life discussed in the introduction and, to a large extent, the genesis of the world we live in today.

In the US, 1968 was the year of unravelling. John F. Kennedy had been dead – killed by an assassin's bullet – for four years. The US had been actively engaged in the war in Vietnam for almost ten years, but the January/ February 1968 events of the Tet Offensive created a decisive

Figure 2: General Nguyen Ngoc Loan executes a prisoner, Feb. 1968. Photograph by Eddie Adams

[6] As Marcus Boon pointed out to me in a personal communication, drugs, sex, and radical politics as an assemblage are traceable back to at least Allan Ginsberg's "Howl" in the mid-1950s. As Boon further notes, the political moment of which Žižek writes is precise at least in part because of his "aversion to corporeality and eroticism and his desire to make his hatred of the body and of 'sexual enjoyment' coincide with a supposedly ethical political position. It's also possible to read this as part of a much broader anti-feminist discourse, a hatred of the mother's body if you like, along with the 'oceanic feeling,' that then props up 'materialism' and the discourse of the grotesque as a masculinist repression of primordial femininity." Evidence supporting this argument can certainly be found in both Thompson's and Acosta's treatment of the female body in their gonzo works. I will deal with this issue further below.

turning point in the American people's attitude toward the war. The photographs published in newspapers and television images broadcast on nightly news programs did much to establish this turning point by showing to people the realities of war [Figure 2]. The war, amid often-violent protest, continued for another seven years.

On April 4, Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis. The assassination sparked riots in cities all across the US resulting in numerous deaths. The day before he died, King delivered a speech in which he called upon the US to uphold its progressive principles:

> All we say to America is, be true to what you said on paper. … If I lived in China or even Russia … I could understand the denial of certain basic First Amendment privileges, because they haven't committed themselves to that…. But somewhere I read of the freedom of assembly. Somewhere I read of the freedom of speech. Somewhere I read of the freedom of press. Somewhere I read that the greatness of America is the right to protest for rights. And so … we aren't going to let dogs or water hoses turn us around. We aren't going to let any injunction turn us around. We are going on. (King, Jr.)

On June 5, Robert Kennedy was shot in Los Angeles and he died early on June 6. On March 18 of the same year, less than three months before he was shot, Kennedy, like King, invoked a progressive vision of the US, speaking at the University of Kansas at Lawrence:

> We will find neither national purpose nor national satisfaction in a mere continuation of economic progress, in an endless amassing of worldly goods. We cannot measure national spirit by the Dow Jones Average, nor national achievement by the Gross National Product [GNP]. … The [GNP] includes the destruction of the redwoods and the death of Lake Superior. It grows with the production of napalm and missiles and nuclear warheads. ...

> And if the [GNP] includes all this, there is much that it does not comprehend. It does not allow for the health of our families, the quality of their education, or the joy of their play. It is indifferent to the decency of our factories and the safety of our streets alike. It does not include the beauty of our poetry, or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. … [T]he [GNP] measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country. It measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile and it can tell us everything about America – except whether we are proud to be Americans. (qtd. in Kurlansky 140 – 141)

"Could a man who said such revolutionary things actually get to the White House?" asks Mark Kurlansky in his book-length study of the events of the year 1968, answering: "Yes, it was possible … he was a man the younger generation could relate to and even believe in, a hero in a year poisoned by King's murder. … If he could catch up to McCarthy in the spring, he might be unstoppable. … [U]nless someone stopped him with a bullet" (141 – 142).

Hunter S. Thompson marks August 1968 as, in many ways, the pivotal moment in contemporary US culture, a moment that fully displayed "the weaknesses within the [post-WWII] liberal regime" and that introduced "a powerful alternative to liberalism" in the form of "a resurgent and increasingly self-confident conservatism. However much radical politics seemed to dominate the public face of 1968," writes Alan Brinkley, "the most important political legacy of that critical year was the rise of the Right" (220). On August 8, at their convention in Miami Beach, the Republican Party nominated Richard Nixon – a man whom, upon his passing, Thompson called "a political monster straight out of Grendel and a very dangerous enemy" ("He Was a Crook") – to be their presidential candidate. Like Margaret Thatcher, Nixon made his

world our own, and like Margaret Thatcher he is often depicted in grotesque terms [Figure 3]: "He has poisoned our water forever. Nixon will be remembered as a classic case of a smart man shitting in his own nest. But he also shit in our nests, and that was the crime that history will burn on his memory like a brand. By disgracing and degrading the Presidency of the United States, by fleeing the White House like a diseased cur, Richard Nixon broke the heart of the American Dream" (Thompson, "He Was a Crook").

On August 26 – 28, at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, the protestors demanding an end to the war in Vietnam were "gassed and beaten by an army of cops run amok with carte blanche from the Daley–Johnson combine" (Thompson, "Running for Sheriff" 82). Sitting in a bar, Thompson writes, "only the plywood windows reminded those of us inside that the American Dream was clubbing itself to death just a few feet away" ("Chicago"). "I went there as a journalist," he writes elsewhere; "my candidate had been murdered in Los Angeles two months earlier – but I left Chicago in a state of hysterical angst, convinced by what I'd seen that we were all in very bad trouble … and in fact that the whole country was doomed unless somebody … could mount a new kind of power to challenge the rotten, high-powered machinery of men like [the Mayor of Chicago Richard J.] Daley and [Lyndon B.] Johnson" ("Running for Sheriff" 83).

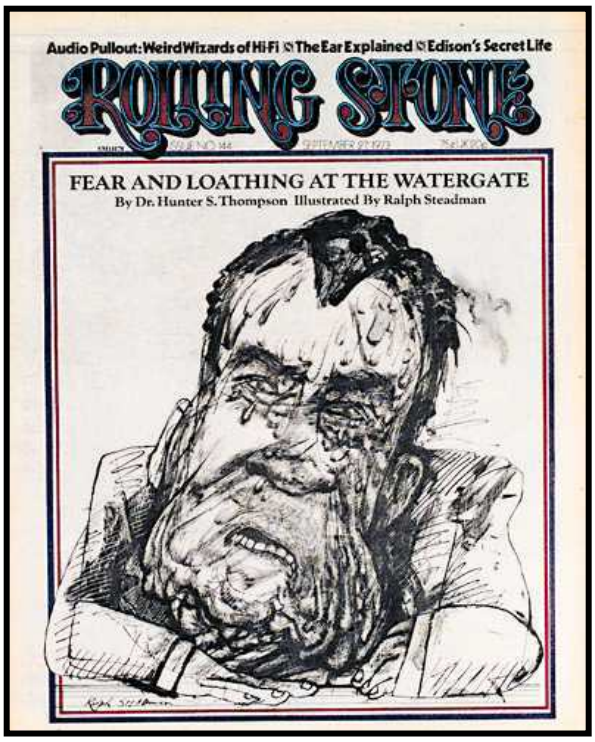


Figure 2: A grotesque Nixon by Ralph Steadman, *Rolling Stone* 144 (Sept. 1973)

In November, Richard Nixon won the popular vote (and the election) by a slim margin of five hundred thousand votes (less than one percent). Like Thatcher was to do in 1979 and Ronald Reagan in 1980, Nixon campaigned on the assumption that "the average American was tired of the liberals and the radicals and the disorder they seemed to tolerate, that most voters wanted a return to stability, order, and traditional values" (Brinkley 234). Violence, he argued, "may masquerade as 'civil disobedience,' or 'freedom,' … and it sometimes marches under the banner of legitimate dissent. … But when the slogans are stripped away, it still is violence plain and simple, cruel and evil as always, destructive of freedom, destructive of progress, destructive of peace" (qtd. in Brinkley 234). By the end of 1968, the high and beautiful wave had indeed rolled back, and by 1971, when Thompson wrote and published *FLLV*, you could "go up on a steep hill in Las Vegas" – the mecca of the emerging New Capitalist Order – "and look West, and with the right kind of eyes you [could] almost *see* the high water mark" that this wave had made upon the United States landscape (68).

Thompson's journalistic work and Acosta's autobiographical novels are attempts to write the US out of this situation. They mark the death of a particular version of the American Dream and the dawn of the truly contemporary era, in that they recognize in the sphere of (the quickly-becoming-global) capitalism and democratic materialism that which the grotesque-carnivalesque "emphasize[s]" and "exhume[s], in [its] own laughing ambiguity" more generally: "a culture's ambiguities about itself" (Remshardt 43). It is therefore not surprising that Bakhtin's landmark study of this aesthetic form was translated and published in France in 1970, after Julia Kristeva introduced Bakhtin's theories into her work in 1966, nor that the interest in Bakhtin in the US came in the early 1980s, after the election of Ronald Reagan secured conservatism's place in US politics and moved the entire political discourse further to the right of political centre. The

interest in the carnival and the grotesque is here an anxious attempt to find a space of freedom in what is perceived to be a losing struggle over culture even as the hegemonic discourses of capitalism are themselves in the process of carnivalising this culture. While the post-WWII consensus in the West saw a general expansion of social programs and a strengthening of progressive political causes, the post-1968 reality saw a turn to the right and a revitalization of the politics of what many see as callous individualism. And in many ways, the works of Acosta and Thompson are reactions to this new reality – they are kinds of textual-performative raging against the dying of the light.

It is in the work of Thompson and Acosta, among others around this period, that the carnivalesque-grotesque takes on a truly contemporary disposition. This shift is driven by a recognition of the oncoming ubiquity of global capitalism and by a concomitant rise of what Alain Badiou calls democratic materialism: an individualistic ideology according to which bodies and languages are all there is. As trying to reveal a realm of truths that would supplement and transform the realm of bodies and languages, as projects driven by a kind of delight in violent negation that shares many of its characteristics with the punk ethos, the texts of Acosta and Thompson elaborate grotesque worlds that parallel developments in Western theory and philosophy, in that they seek a space of freedom within the all-pervasive realm of the capitalist/democratic-materialist consensus.

Around and after 1968, simultaneously energised by the May protests and disheartened by a quick return to the recently minted status quo, Western (continental) theory developed two major frameworks which theorist of different stripes have since utilised, with which they have had to grapple, and through which they have tried to engage the contemporary reality. On the one hand, following the 1967 publication of Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, deconstructive

criticism proposed that even though "humankind's common desire is for a stable center, and for the assurance of mastery – through knowing or possessing" (Spivak xi), no system, no structure can ever be fully or permanently stabilised. This is so because the fundamental nature of the sign around which any structure is developed (God, King, free-market individualism, etc.) is always a structure of difference:

> half of it [is] always "not there" and the other half always "not that." The structure of the sign is determined by the trace … of that other which is forever absent. This other is of course never to be found in its full being. As even such empirical events as answering a child's question or consulting the dictionary proclaim, one sign leads to another and so on indefinitely. … Derrida … gives the name "trace" to the part played by the radically other within the structure of difference that is the sign. (Spivak xvii)

By exploring various discursive systems, "from literature to politics," Derrida's deconstructive readings are "able to weave and unweave strands of … text[s] to reveal stories and structures of Western thought complicit in or folded into a vast network of problematic and characteristic [or hegemonic] thinking about language, consciousness, and much more" (Balfour 468). As we have seen in the previous chapter, this conceptualisation of structure is the basic component of what Redding identifies as the contemporary American gothic – which often shares territory with the grotesque – as its fundamental gesture is that of showing the way structure is always-already decomposing (or is being deconstructed) from within. The theoretical approach of this conceptualisation of structure is at the basic level textual or ghostly, in that its primary strategy is to find the trace of the other in the already existing structure, and in this it differs from the grotesque which is in this sense much closer to the other post-1968 theoretical/philosophical productive dead-end – 'dead end' in a limited, positive sense that these theoretical frameworks

always function within the ubiquity of structures which they are, at the very least, suspicious of and out of which they ultimately fail to find an exit – that of the passion for the Real.

Following the work of Jacques Lacan and Gilles Deleuze, as different as the work of these theorists is, the post-1968 milieu's other major strategy for dealing with what is perceived to be ubiquitous structure is postulating *the Real* (or *the virtual*) as that which always resists structuring or symbolisation. There is in Lacan, as in Derrida, a recognition that humanity desires mastery: "As revolutionaries, you are hysterics who demand a new master [and] you will get one," Lacan had said to the May '68 protestors (qtd. in Žižek, "The Ambiguous Legacy"). The Real, however, is that which – structurally – makes complete mastery impossible, despite the individual or group desires of any one party. In early Lacan, this concept's function was of "only minor importance, acting as a kind of safety rail" (Sheridan x), but through the 1960s and 70s,

> the Real takes on an … increasing number of aspects and connotations. It becomes both a transcendence troubling … Imaginary-Symbolic reality and its language from without [and] an immanence perturbing and subverting reality/language from within. It comes to be associated with libidinal negativities (*objet petit a*, *jouissance*, … sexual difference…), material meaninglessness both linguistic … and non-linguistic, … traumatic events, unbearable bodily intensities, anxiety, and death. (Johnston, "Jacques Lacan")

The Real here provides a means of uncovering that which escapes the enveloping structures, that "over which the symbolic stumbles," and "which is refractory, resistant" (Sheridan x). What Derrida sees as immanent to structure and as revealed through play (with words, concepts, and

structures), Lacan postulates as existing outside of/adjacent to the Imaginary-Symbolic order, as systematically inadmissible to it, yet forming complex relationships with it[7].

In Deleuze's work, the virtual (which, I would here like to suggest, is functionally isomorphic to the Lacanian Real) takes on the function of opening a gap in the actual (which is functionally isomorphic to the Lacanian Imaginary-Symbolic). It operates differently from the Lacanian Real, yet its purpose is similar: it represents a space of deterritorialization, of flux, upon which the realm of the actual imposes structure without ever fully stopping the possibilities of flight: "constants are drawn from the variables themselves," write Deleuze and Guattari in *ATP*; "*Constant is not opposed to variable*; it is a treatment of the variable opposed to the other kind of treatment, or continuous variation" (103). Here again, the ontological structure of what there is does not permit – as in Derrida[8] and Lacan – complete structural ossification. Structures are, in other words, only ever secondary elaborations of a more fundamental ontological aspect of reality that consists of singularities, elusive entities that make up an important aspect of the virtual and which embody flux and instability: they "mutate and change as a result of the events that take place with respect to them. Previous singularities appear, others disappear, and often the entity is destroyed altogether as a result of operations that were too much for it" (Bryant). The potentiality of change can thus never be erased. It exists always as a fundamental component of that which is actual: objects, bodies, political and economic structures.

Now, despite their intense focus on words and language, all three theorists – Derrida, Lacan, and Deleuze – also, importantly, recognise that "[w]e cannot transcend transcendence with words, but we might be able to do so with new images" (Mullarkey 161). They do so, as

[7] I will elaborate on this in the following chapter.

[8] Admittedly, this is in Derrida a question of structure rather than of ontology.

John Mullarkey argues, via thinking (in) diagrams: words under erasure, mathematical formulas, or hand-drawn figures (see Mullarkey 157ff). In the context of our discussion of the grotesque, the work of Acosta (and Thompson) will show us that the grotesque de-formed body is precisely a type of diagram that "modulates … theory" (174). On the one hand, it opens the Decisional theoretical vista of corporeal-ontological-Multiplicity explored in the previous two chapters and, as such, it engages the post-1968 theory's passion for the Real in its relation to the Symbolic. (This structure is Decisional or correlationist because it is, in the first place, aesthetic and therefore affective and because it bears on human experience and discourse, which are always correlational or premised on a subject-object relation.) On the other hand, the 'grotesque diagram' uses this theoretical trajectory to *asymptotically* '*reach beyond'* the Real-as-a-theoretical-dead-end: as that about which nothing can be said.

This is accomplished in Acosta's (and Thompson's) texts through an exploration of the failure of justice as diagrammed by grotesque bodies, a failure that parallels the perceived failure of the 1960s progressive political vision. As we will see via a reading of these texts, this is done by first engaging the carnivalesque-grotesque language and tropes as already implicated in the logic of hegemonic discourses. These are then placed under erasure in order to utilise the (political) failure of this language as a revealing of the grotesque body as a diagram, as *the Thing* with the potentiality to asymptotically 'reach beyond' the Real-as-a-theoretical-dead-end. At the same time, the first step (the engagement with the carnivalesque language) is never fully negated – it, rather, remains visible underneath the grotesque body as a diagram.

In this sense, the grotesque body aligns with Speculative Realism's project of making productive post-1968 theory's passion for the Real, a project that – via Ray Brassier – draws upon François Laruelle's works of non-philosophy in order to explore this concept (i.e. the Real).

The grotesque body aligns with this project by taking a speculative turn into "properly ontological questions" (Bryant, Srnicek, and Harman 4), questions which: a) work against the anti-realist trend in continental theory that has manifested itself through, among other things, "an aversion to science, a focus on language, culture, and subjectivity to the detriment of material factors, an anthropocentric stand toward nature, a relinquishing of the search for absolutes, and an acquiescence to the specific conditions of our historical thrownness" (Bryant, Srnicek, and Harman 4); and b) contend that there is "an aspect of ontology that is independent of its enmeshment in human concerns" as a result of the commitment to the idea that "a world exists independent of ourselves" (Bryant, Srnicek, and Harman 16). Importantly, however, "[c]ontinental philosophy is not negated by what follows it, but simply crossed out, and as such, remains visible beneath" (Mullarkey 160). (Not only should this be obvious from the work of previous chapters, it will also be more fully elaborated in the next chapter's use of Catherine Malabou's notion of *plasticity*, which draws upon/places under erasure Derrida's *différance*.)

Consequently, as we will see in this and the next chapters, the grotesque – Janus-like – simultaneously instantiates two theoretical moves: it, again, opens the Decisional theoretical vista of corporeal-ontological-Multiplicity explored in the previous two chapters, and it performs the Non-Decisional theory for Decision[9] (Laruelle/Brassier). The chief characteristic of its engagement with the Real therefore rests on its performing/revealing/naming the radically

[9] In this sense, the grotesque body has the same function the letter as symbol has in Badiou: "The letter [grotesque body] is not an *epistemological* category for Badiou: it is *simultaneously* an integral moment in a truth process, marking its inaugural act of decision or intervention, *and* the matter of the knowledge of being. The disposition of letters involves a supernumerary *act* that at once founds the work of truth *and* the extension of being beyond its previous limits. Truth *and* being, name *and* number, quality *and* quantity: this is the irreducible double destiny of the letter in Badiou. Being *and* the knowledge of being, truth *and* Truth, all meet in the materiality of letters" (Clemens 92 – 93, and qtd. in Mullarkey 172).

immanent Real, which not only escapes symbolisation/actualisation, but also in its radical immanence/materiality exists as "anterior to every form of human relation to the world" (Meillassoux 10). The grotesque body thus names a "hole in nothingness itself, not just in being," a "blind spot for philosophical auto-reflection" (Laruelle 175). Here, matter (and thought) – via the grotesque body as its instantiation – is recognised as an instance of unilateral duality (Laruelle) via which matter "effectuates the *unilateralizing* identity" of thought, while thought "instantiates the *unilateralized* difference" of matter "as it distinguishes itself from [it]" (Brassier, "Axiomatic Heresy" 27). In other words, as we discussed in the Introduction, we must start with matter: it must always come first. As an instantiation and index of ancestral reality, the grotesque body is that which shows us that even when metamorphosis happens, structure persists. At its simplest, this structure is the structure of an existent ("non-human," "alien") body as Real – that which shows us that it is "something in the object itself [that] determines the discrepancy between its material reality – the fact *that* it is, its existence – and its being, construed as quiddity, or *what* it is" (Brassier, "Concepts and Objects" 55). In other words, "the reality of the object determines the meaning of its conception" (55). At the same time, it is only with thought (philosophy or theory) that matter is differentiated from thought, as thought conditioned by matter distinguishes itself from it. Thought comprehends matter as effectuating thought's unilateralizing identity: as coming first. Thought is thus "determined in the last instance" by matter (Brassier, "Axiomatic Heresy" 30).

Finally, in contrast to the reactionary use of the Real – which Žižek describes as "a [post-1968] direct, brutal push-toward-the-Real, which assumed three main forms: first, the search for extreme forms of sexual enjoyment; second, the turn toward the Real of an inner experience (Oriental mysticism); and, finally, the rise of leftist political terrorism (Red Army Faction in

Germany, Red Brigades in Italy, etc.)" ("The Ambiguous Legacy") – we must subsequently re-connect the Real with the (progressively) political. Doing so will accomplish two things: on the one hand, it will bastardize the concept of the Real by conceptualising it as Symbolic-Real, Imaginary-Real, and (only ever asymptotically as) Real-Real (this will be taken up in the next chapter); on the other, it will allow us to use this concept productively. We must thus start by being "passive before the Real, letting it be, thinking alongside it" through "pure description" (Mullarkey 145) as a means of opening up a space of truths, which has the benefit of countering new capitalism's/democratic materialism's investment in the absolute relativisation and revolutionising of "the whole relations of society" (Marx and Engels 476). We must end up, however, by drawing the Real back into a relationship with the Imaginary-Symbolic, through which process the space of truths is given consistency beyond a simply formal one. The wager of this and the next chapters is that the grotesque allows us to, productively, do both. In light of this wager, the rest of the present chapter's aim is to show how Acosta's (and Thompson's) uses of the carnivalesque and of grotesque bodies diagram a failure of justice that parallels the perceived failure of the 1960s progressive political vision and simultaneously open the non-human horizon of the Real.

Brown Bodies and Justice

In an epitaph written after Acosta disappeared in Mexico in 1974, Thompson described him as "a dangerous thug" of "monstrous convictions. There was more mercy, madness, dignity, and generosity," Thompson writes, "in that overweight, overworked and always overindulged brown cannonball of a body than most of us will meet in any human package even three times Oscar's size for the rest of our lives – which are all running leaner on the high side, since that

rotten fat spic disappeared" ("Introduction" 5 – 6). The physical markers of the human body – which Thompson so effectively emphasises in Acosta's epitaph through both descriptively neutral and racially-charged terms – are a focal feature of both these authors' works, playing a crucial role in Acosta's and Thompson's deployments of "Gonzo techniques," which rely on, among other narrative devices, "grotesque exaggeration and the blurring of the frontiers between the real and the imaginary" (Bruce-Novoa 45).

Figure 4: Ralph Steadman's illustration of Duke and Gonzo (*FLLV* 146 - 147)

Consider the way Thompson, early in *FLLV*, describes the trip he (as his alter-ego, Raoul Duke) is on with his attorney, Dr. Gonzo, who is modelled after Acosta [Figure 4]:

> [O]ur trip … was a classic affirmation of everything right and true and decent in the national character. It was a gross, physical salute to the fantastic *possibilities* of life in this country – but only for those with true grit. And we were chock full of that.
>
> My attorney understood this concept, despite his racial handicap. (18)

The "gross, physical" nature of their journey and the racial markers of Dr. Gonzo's body will continue to reverberate throughout Thompson's (and Acosta's) work as the two – Thompson and Acosta, Duke and Gonzo, (and King and Oscar) – investigate what is happening to the American Dream in the post-1968 period, doing so via acts of "monstrously extreme civil disobedience" whose goal is to "break the laws in order to make better ones, thus *conserving the law even while*

destroying it" (Wright 636, emphasis added) in order to keep the progressive vision of the US alive. This socio-political and legal strategy is, as Greg Wright keenly observes, closely tied to Thompson's and Acosta's textual and aesthetic strategies: their "corepresenting 'the Menace' as a force of pure [anarchic] oppositionality" is mitigated by "the textuality of their respective accounts. … Because the gonzo narrative structure is so grossly exaggerated, its unbelievability manages to [legally] exculpate its proponents" (632 – 633).

Through this gonzo strategy of "gross exaggeration," these texts become bearers of a "unique epistemological and ontological status" which enables them "to distort the surfaces of conventional journalistic [and autobiographical] accounts into symbols of fictive truth" (Hellmann 17). Gonzo journalism and autobiography of Thompson and Acosta thus exist as "socially symbolic act(s) that transcend the [given] text(s)" (Jirón-King 2). The role of these texts is therefore at least dual. As operating in the realms of discursivity (text and culture), their role is epistemological, participating in the game of meaning. As symbolic acts which "perform[ ] just as much as [they] say" (G. Wright 631), however, these texts also open an ontological horizon, doing so primarily through their use of the grotesque.

By looking at the relationship between the epistemological and the ontological horizons they delimit, the following analysis aims to show that the aesthetics of gonzo presentation of Acosta's (and Thompson's) texts' – a kind of textual-imagistic performance of an assault upon the human body that John Hellmann describes as composing a "perceived chaos" of "a bestial world" (23) – is used as a knot tying together multiple acts of narrated transgression (law-breaking), a knot whose ultimate function is dually and trans-narratively transgressive (Law-breaking). Firstly, grotesque imagistic language here performs (trans-narrative) transgression on the level of Symbolic reality as language's function as transmitter of meaning – whose limits are

conventionally seen to "mean the limits of my world" (Wittgenstein 68) – is temporarily negated in favour of a use of language as information, as tending toward a "linguistically meaningless physical pattern" that is an index of what Manuel Delanda calls "material expressivity" ("Material Expressivity"). In other words, Acosta's texts reveal the grotesque (Chicano) body as a place where meaning fails, as a place of meaningless yet effective/affective presentation which provokes abjection, shock, and anxiety, a presentation that is pulled into webs of meaning only as a secondary process. Secondly, and as a consequence of the first transgression, grotesque-imagistic language reveals/diagrams the a-human horizon of matter in-itself as autonomous, a horizon "of separability of thought and being, their non-correlation" (Brassier, *Nihil Unbound* 84), through which Symbolic Law is augmented via its relation to the Matter-ial Real. The grotesque body thus aligns with Speculative Realism's project of making productive post-1968 theory's passion for the Real.

The role of the grotesque and its relation to this dual transgression begins to emerge in Acosta's texts with the shift in the utilisation of the human body between *The Autobiography* and *The Revolt*. Even though both these texts' primary underlying concern is a brown man's attempt to navigate the US's cultural landscape while refusing to be interpellated by both the hegemonic culture and the counterculture (Jirón-King 3), their presentation of this concern differs starkly. There is, in each of these texts, a single moment that reveals this through Acosta's tactical utilization of the grotesque. The opening chapter of *The Autobiography* depicts Oscar "stand[ing] naked before the mirror," observing and commenting on his body: his "brown belly," "an enormous chest of two large hunk of brown tit," his ears – a "single bodily perfection" – "large, peasant hands," "sunbaked face," and "big, brown ass" (11 – 12). As he sits on the toilet, "laugh[ing] at the sight of a Brown Buffalo sitting on his throne" (12), he argues in his mind with

his Jewish psychotherapist, Dr. Serbin – "that skinny fag without character" (14). Then, after his "bowels [are] relieved," he showers, imagining himself as Humphrey Bogart, a war hero and a POW, resisting the torture of "the sneaky Japs" (15). This performance/fantasy of masculinity – which here again highlights grotesque's close historical ties with embodiments of a particular type of gender politics – leads to sexual fantasies which gravitate between a figure alluded to as his mother and his "friend's old lady with the short, blonde hair and silver lips," and he masturbates, knowing "secretly, down deep inside she wants [him] to grab her graceful neck, twist those soft, long arms of hers and jam her into the shower so [he] can nibble away at those delectable, dainty breasts of warm, white meat that [he] suck[s] now as the brown giant explodes" (16).

The Revolt's central deployment of the grotesque is glaringly different in tone. "The week after McIntyre got the ax," Acosta writes at the beginning of the eighth chapter, "I first encountered death as a world of art" (89). This chapter focuses mostly on an exhumation and autopsy of a Chicano teenager, Robert Fernandez – "just another expendable Cockroach" (104). Fernandez lived and grew up in Tooner Flats district of East Los Angeles, "a neighbourhood of shacks and clotheslines and dirty back yards," where "[s]kinny dogs and wormy cats sniff garbage cans in the alleys" (90). He was a *vato loco*, a "crazy guy," one of the many who "learn about life from the toughest guy in the neighbourhood," "smoke [their] first joint in an alley at the age of ten," and who "take [their] first hit of *carga* [heroin] before [they] get laid" (90).

> On the day he died, Robert had popped reds with wine and then conked out for a few hours. When he awoke he was ready for more. But first he went down to Cronie's on Whittier Boulevard, the Chicano Sunset Strip. Every other door is a bar, a pawn shop or a liquor store. Hustlers roam freely across asphalt decorated with vomit and dogshit. If

> you score in East Los Angeles you score on The Boulevard. Broads, booze and dope. Cops on every corner make no difference. The fuzz, *la placa*, *la chota*, *los marranos*, *la jura* or just the plain old pig. The eternal enemies of the people. … The *vato loco* has been fighting with the pig since the Anglos stole his land in the last century. He will continue to fight until he is exterminated. (90 – 91)

After being arrested for yelling "Chicano Power!" at *los marranos*, Robert is remanded for "Plain Drunk, a misdemeanor" (92). He then calls his mother, asking her to contact his bail bondsman; "Juana had called the bail bondsman before she received the second call. This time it was a cop. He simply wanted to tell her that Robert was dead. He'd just hung himself. And would she come down and identify the body" (93). While the city's coroner rules that he died by suicide, Robert's family notices bruising all over Robert's body and decides to ask "Mr. Brown" to help them. The rest of the chapter focuses on the autopsy of Robert Fernandez's exhumed body.

Unlike the Rabelaisian presentation of the body in *The Autobiography*, the bodies in the autopsy scene of *The Revolt* are presented in an uncompromisingly bleak, austere way. Oscar walks through the Hall of Justice, which holds "Sirhan Sirhan, the mysterious Arab who shot Kennedy, and Charles Manson, the acid fascist" (98)[10]. In a "large dark room full of hospital carts" (98) he faces "bare-ass naked death" (99): "[b]odies of red and purple meat; bodies of men with white skin gone yellow; bodies of black men with blood over torn faces.

> This one has an arm missing. The stub is tied off with plastic string. The red-headed woman with full breasts? Someone has ripped the right ear from her head. The genitals of that spade are packed with towels. Look at it! Listen! The blood is still gurgling.

[10] I will return to Manson and his connection to the carnivalesque-grotesque later in the chapter.

> There, an old wino, his legs crushed, mangled, gone to mere meat. And there, young boys die too. And there, a once-beautiful chick, look at her. How many boys tried to get between those legs, now dangling pools of red-black blood?
>
> Don't turn away from it, goddamnit! Don't be afraid of bare-ass naked death. Hold your head up, open your eyes, don't be embarrassed, boy! I walk forward, I hold my breath. My head is buzzing, … my hands are wet and I cannot look away from the dead cunts, the frizzled balls, the lumps of tit, the fat asses of white meat. (98 – 99)

These bodies – these "dead cunts" and "frizzled balls" that provoke such a strong visceral reaction in the protagonist and the reader – are not simply the controlled bodies of Foucault's disciplinary society which function almost exclusively in the Symbolic realm. These are bodies upon which physical force has exercised its power, turning them into "lumps of tit" and "fat asses of white meat."

The autopsy is even more austere, controlled, clean: "There is no blood, no gory scene. All is cold and dry" (100). The body is stripped, the chest unstitched. "Holding open the rib cage," the head pathologist "carefully pulls out plastic packages from inside the chest cavity. … 'Intestines.' The meat is weighed out. 'Heart… Liver…' Sand and sawdust spill to the table" (100). In order to determine whether what appear to be bruises are actual bruises, each potentially bruised spot must be excised and "plunk[ed] into a jar of clear liquid" (101). Then, Oscar, "the big *chingón*," "Mr. Buffalo Z. Brown," "so good and deserving of love," in a frenzy of sanctioned violence[11], with nothing but feverish determination and a borrowed authority,

[11] Consider here the examination of sanctioned violence discussed in relation to Margaret Thatcher in the previous chapter. This is another way in which the grotesque aesthetic form recognizes the ambiguity of 'their' world as ours. Oscar, the countercultural figure and the defender of the people, here acts in the interest of the people on borrowed authority, as an organ of power.

"order[s] those white men to cut up the brown body of that Chicano boy" (104). "Cut here. Slice there. Here. There. Cut, cut, cut! Slice, slice, slice! And into a jar. Soon we have a whole row of jars with little pieces of meat" (102). The head is opened, the brain removed. There is "[n]o blood in here, boy. Just sand. We don't want a mess" (102). The neck bone is pulled out, then the gizzard. The face is taken off, made to "hang[ ] down the back of the head. The face is a mask. The mouth is where the brain… The nose is at the back of the neck. The hair is the ears. The brown nose is hanging where the neck…" (103). And then, the body is no longer an organism: "[B]ody is a whole… this is a joke" (102). Finally, the dick is cut off. "There is no more Robert" (104).

As already noted, the deployment of the grotesque in *The Autobiography* is very much Rabelaisian-Bakhtinian in spirit. As such, even though it embodies an ambiguous attitude toward our world, this use of the grotesque sees power as an embodiment of high-seriousness[12] – its tone as "monolithically serious" and laughter as "alien to it" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 9) – and as, in this sense, opposed to it. In other words, this use of the grotesque fails to recognise the already-carnivalesque nature of the new, global capitalism. In *The Autobiography*, Acosta admittedly critiques and largely discredits the carnivalesque impetus of "the countercultural postwar road narrative" promulgated by the Beats and the hippies, doing so by "explod[ing] th[is] myth as a liberatory trope, … revealing the deep ethnic and racial parameters for mobility that work against Chicanos' attempts to obtain agency and independence" (Carrasqiullo 77, 79). However, in this same text and even in *The Revolt*, the carnivalesque-grotesque aesthetic mode survives, along with "Oscar's [the protagonist's] entrenchment in mainstream social rebellion as well as Acosta's [the author/narrator's] in Anglo-American literary convention" (81). In other words,

[12] See also the discussion of Thatcher as an embodiment of culture of high-seriousness in Chapter 2.

the critique of this myth in *The Autobiography* does not fully exculpate Oscar from its consequences, and Acosta seems to be aware of this tension.

Marci L. Carrasquillo, along with other critics, notes that even though *The Autobiography* "culminates in a deft challenge to nationalistic and essentialist notions of racial, ethnic, national, and religious identity" (78), Acosta "succumbs to the excesses of patriarchy, for he is limited by stereotypical formulations for 'real' masculinity that have been integral to the American road trip plot and to the frontier narrative – as well as to the Chicano movement" (80). But while Carrasquillo, like other critics, draws a line between Oscar's treatment of race and his treatment of gender, they are in fact a part of a unified carnivalesque-grotesque representational strategy: that of committing absolutely to the physicality of bodies and what one does with them. Aside from the ambiguity that Bakhtin recognises in grotesque's attitudes toward life, laughter, etc., this particular ambiguity of the grotesque (as both a countercultural, subversive aesthetic form and a part of the hegemonic order; as both liberatory and caught up in various – particularly, in this case, masculinist and patriarchal – discourses) is the defining characteristic of the new, truly contemporary use of the grotesque which tries to recognise its own enmeshment within this contemporary world in which laughter and carnivalisation are a part of hegemonic discourses.

In *The Autobiography* this commitment is fraught with apparently reactionary dimensions. Louis Mendoza highlights these as "unresolved contradictions within the [Chicano] movement that led to a decline in … [its] political efficacy" (83). Writing of *The Revolt* in terms equally if not more applicable to *The Autobiography*, Mendoza comments on the "epithets and racial slurs, as well as sexist and homophobic remarks" and "the uncritical representation of sexism and homophobia" that permeate its narrative (83). Similarly, Jirón-King writes that "[t]he counter culture they [Acosta and Thompson] criticize [and arguably belong to] simply develops its own

forms of racism, classism, power-mongering, and corruption that re-inscribe hegemonic discourses rather than creating new social forms and values" (10). Joe D. Rodríguez and Carrasquillo are even less forgiving: "Oscar's identification [with hyper-masculine models such as Bogart, McQueen, and Hemingway] relegates women even further from freedom to the status of sexual object and static muse"(87), notes the latter, while the former argues that both *The Autobiography* and *The Revolt*

> often denigrate women and seem not to include them in a Chicano agenda for full rights and equal privileges. Many Chicana … critics see his women characters as little more than sources of ego gratification and sexual release. Both books use derogatory labels for ethnics of color and those who happen to be white. (9)

These assessments are, of course, valid if somewhat perfunctory. As in the cases of R. Crumb, Francis Bacon, and Quentin Tarantino, they register the grotesque aesthetic form's historical alignment with masculinist discourses and with the sphere of male bonding – something that is patently obvious in the works of Acosta and Thompson. Yet, while not discounting these assessments, another function of such derogatory language only becomes apparent when this language is placed in its proper context: that of the grotesque nature of its political project.

As stated earlier, in both *The Autobiography* and *The Revolt*, racial, ethnic, and sexist slurs index Oscar's absolute commitment to the matter-iality of the body and its use, and to the consequences of this commitment, which cut across both the private (socio-sexual) and public (socio-political) realms. These texts' reactionary aspects emerge, then, within the context of "Acosta-as-narrator's carnivalesque worldview" (Aldama 71). In this context, Oscar deploys "the carnivalizing spirit of laughter" which, even though it "does not overturn disciplining narratives," "offer[s] him a moment of insertion (felt anger) into and against the disciplinary

power structures" (Aldama 72), anger which is at times, regrettably, misdirected. As such, the Rabelaisian-Bakhtinian carnivalesque is here, as it is in general, double-edged. On the one hand, in the Bakhtinian vein, it is "positive, regenerating, [and] creative" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 71), as well as "subversive [and] parodic" (Aldama 71). This aspect is evident in the first fictionalized encounter of Oscar (Acosta) and King (Thompson) in *The Autobiography*, where their exchanges are characterized by "ironic banter" in which they "cut each other down with racial slurs" (Sánchez 105; see Acosta, *The Autobiography* 139 – 140). This ironic banter is, of course, the foundation of both their masculine friendship and the development of the gonzo ethos, as is evident in much of the carnivalesque energy of Thompson's *FLLV* and his other works. On the other hand, the politics of the carnivalesque also displays what Stallybrass and White call "displaced abjection" whereby "weaker, not stronger, social groups – women, ethnic and religious minorities, those who 'don't belong'" are "often violently abuse[d] and demonize[d]" (19). In *The Autobiography*, this displaced abjection is evident from the very first, above quoted, chapter in which Oscar fantasises about "jam[ming]" a female figure "into the shower" (16).

In other words, the source of what Mendoza identifies as the "unresolved contradictions within the [Chicano] movement" (83) is, at once, its strength and the cause of its downfall and is presented as such in Acosta's work. (Speaking more generally, and taking into consideration the lessons of Derrida's deconstruction, the problem of unresolved contradictions is a problem plaguing any structure.) In *The Autobiography*, this is made clear through the grotesque-carnivalesque presentation of the (most often male) body and, paradoxically, its role in Oscar's development as an individual. *The Autobiography* is in these terms a kind of bildungsroman whose title signals its personal nature, yet whose narrative gradually works towards the described self's dissolution in the interest of a politically progressive engagement with the world. By its

end, Oscar comes to a realisation that he is "neither a Mexican nor an American," "neither a Catholic nor a protestant," but "a Chicano by ancestry and a Brown Buffalo by choice" (199). This realisation of his liminality, a kind of culmination of personal growth that leads to the individual's de-composition and to Oscar/Zeta's group-engagement in *The Revolt*, is presented in terms of a reconfiguration of Oscar's self-understanding via the aesthetic category of the grotesque. The crisis exposed through the carnivalesque presentation of Oscar's body in the opening chapter of *The Autobiography* is a crisis instigated by the internalisation of "the white gaze's abnormalization of the brown subject" trough which Oscar "becomes an unruly bodily mass of brown flesh that consumes white images – and foodstuffs" (Aldama 69). This understanding of his self as a "degenerate object" (Aldama 69) is aligned by Acosta's text with a dual nature of Oscar's subjectivity.

On the one hand, through the figure of Dr. Serbin, the "Ivy League, black-haired bastard" of a "Jewish shrink" who "doesn't even know how to laugh when a good line is thrown him" (13), Oscar shows his subjectivity to be premised on what Michel Foucault calls *pastoral power*. "The political problem" that this kind of power promulgates is that of "the relation between the one and the many" ("Omnes" 307). As such, it is "both an individualizing and a totalizing form of power" that "integrated into a new political shape an old power technique that originated in Christian institutions" ("The Subject and Power" 332). Three important characteristics of this kind of power are that it is: a) individualizing, b) stresses self-examination, and c) links obedience with knowledge of self and, most importantly, with confession ("Omnes" 308 – 310). Oscar's understanding of his self as "the nigger, after all," as "nothing but an Indian with sweating body and faltering tits that sag at the sight of a young girl's blue eyes" (*The Autobiography* 94 – 95) is premised upon this act of confession to his psychoanalyst – "Moses

and Freud really got to him," Oscar comments upon Dr. Serbin (19) – and refracted through the eyes of "thousands of pigtailed, blue-eyed girls from America" (95). Through these acts of self-understanding and confession, through this subjection to the Judeo-Christian Law of *sublime* revelation so closely linked to the discourses of white patriarchal power, Oscar attaches a pejorative meaning to his grotesque self-perception as a "sweating body" with "faltering tits" (*The Autobiography* 94).

On the other hand, Oscar's sense of self is tied to the work that he does as a legal aider, helping "the poor, the downtrodden, and the lonely" (20) who wait for him "in the dingy waiting room of the Legal Aid Society … in the slums of East Oakland" (18). Despite – or precisely because of – providing help to those who need it, however, Oscar recognizes his functional role in an organisation with "a mandate from Congress," with "a pretty good salary to boot" (20 – 21). "Don't get me wrong," he notes, "we have the right motives. Our hearts are in the right place. It's just that we aren't competent. We haven't the guts to really take them [real cases[13]] on. In point of fact, we aren't lawyers, we are simply counsellors of old women" (20), victims of patriarchal violence who regularly come to his office "with bloody noses and black eyes from the old man's weekend drunk" (21). Oscar recognizes that, despite the fact that he works to help victims of domestic and societal abuse, he is not much more than part of a short-term solution to a systemic problem and as such actually a part of the problem itself. As Oscar notes:

> Doesn't LBJ know that Watts burned in '65? That Detroit rioted in '66? That the Panthers started carrying guns in '67? Am I to prevent all this with a carbon copy of a court order that compels a Negro janitor to pay child support for his nine kids? Does anyone seriously believe I can battle Governor Reagan and his Welfare Department even

[13] We will see how later, in *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*, Oscar's tactic will be to go after exactly the kind of 'real' cases that he is afraid to go after here.

> with my fancy $567 red IBM? Do you think our Xerox machine will save Sammy from the draft? Or that our new set of Witkin law books will really help turn the tide in our battle against poverty, powdered milk and overdrawn checks? (28)

The effects of this second aspect of his selfhood – his interpellation by what is here presented as an ubiquitous social order – are grotesquely predictable: "For twelve months now ["since I first began the practice of law"] all I have done is stuffed myself, puked wretched water, stared at the idiot-box, coddled myself, and watched the snakes grow larger inside my head while waiting for the clockhand to turn" (24). Through the act of self-understanding as a functional piece of this social apparatus, through his subjection to the law of democratic-materialism according to which "there are only bodies and languages" (Badiou, *Logics of Worlds* 1) and according to which, consequently, radical change is impossible, Oscar's crisis is pushed to the breaking point.

After the death of his secretary, Pauline, upon whom he was utterly dependent, Oscar "removes … [his legal] license from the nail on the wall and kiss[es] it goodbye," quickly "dump[ing] it in the wastepaper basket" (31). He then visits his shrink, Dr. Serbin, and quits psychotherapy:

> I turn and walk away from him. After ten years I turn my back on that Jew with his ancient history hangups. I get into the car. I cannot control myself. The laughter of madness clenches my throat. Tears are flowing down my fat cheeks, their wetness is warm. A ghost shivers down my back. But I feel good. I shake it off and go to seek more of that demon rum. There is nothing to stop me now. I have paid all my debts, I have paid all my dues and now nothing remains but the joy of madness. Another wild Indian gone amok. (42)

Here, despite his critique of the carnivalesque aspects of Beat and hippie counter-cultures, Oscar embraces two of his critical targets' tools: "the resistant, carnivalizing spirit of laughter" that becomes a "space-clearing device that allows the character to confound and/or subvert ideological structures that restrict his experiences" (Aldama 72), and "the easily recognizable Christian narrative of guilt, confession and redemption" through which he, analogously with Jesus Christ in his thirty-third year, "will symbolically die in San Francisco to be reborn, resurrected in El Paso as a Chicano and as a leader of his people" (Calderón 98 – 99).

Oscar, therefore, opposes a) pastoral power represented by the internalization of sexist and racist ideology that shapes his self-perception, and b) his interpellation within the social apparatus, doing so by adopting a self-confessedly problematic carnivalesque counter-cultural strategy premised in the American context upon a "lived, dynamic spontaneity" of physical mobility[14] (being 'on the road'), and "chemical stimulus" from alcohol, "pot and amphetamines" to "eventually … LSD" (Lee 165). That this strategy is adopted explicitly in the context of *The Autobiography* points to the fact that the problematic being dealt with in this, first of the two, autobiographical texts is that of "the politics of identity" (Muñoz Jr. qtd in Hames-Garcia 465). This problematic embraces a critique of both the hegemonic notions of identity through which Oscar sees himself as a *grotesque* object in contrast to the unattainably *beautiful* "pigtailed, blue-eyed girls from America" (*The Autobiography* 95) and the notions of identity of "politics of Chicano nationalism and its sometimes naïve assumptions about ethnic authenticity" aligned with the aesthetics of the *sublime* via the "artistic and liberatory truth [of] highly idealized visions of an authentic indigenous past" that the Chicano movement often embraced (Hames-Garcia 465 – 466). The carnivalesque strategy that Acosta adopts is, therefore, contrasted to the

[14] This spontaneity is also reflected in Acosta's writing style, modeled after the Beats and which Kerouac called "spontaneous prose." See Kerouac's "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose."

beautiful and the sublime strategies of representation of hegemonic and Chicano nationalisms. In light of the shortcomings of carnivalesque strategies of representation Acosta locates in Beat and hippie cultures, this strategy is supplemented by the Gonzo ethos, which is

> marked by an emphatic author-participant-protagonist, a figure who speaks neither from a detached position nor as a communal voice. The personality of the Gonzo protagonist is exaggerated to such a degree that its subjectivity is defined through its physical and psychological excesses [which also marks its affinity with carnivalesque-grotesque modes of presentation]. Thus, while the author-protagonist regards her- or himself as exceptional, as a participant he or she is not immune to the bite of the work's criticism[15]. (Hames-Garcia 467)

The narrative of *The Autobiography*, hence, centres on Oscar's desperate attempts to find the impossible gonzo-identity[16] that would make him both exceptional and a part of a community, while speaking neither from a detached position nor as a voice of the community. This text is,

---

[15] This becomes frighteningly obvious in Thompson's *FLLV* in which, after Gonzo picks up a naïve girl from the airport, gives her LSD, and has sex with her, Duke jokingly suggests pimping her out to cops who "will go fifty bucks a head to beat her into submission and then gang-fuck her" (114). Afraid they will be charged with kidnapping and rape – resulting in a "nasty federal rap. Especially for a monster Samoan facing a typical white middle-class jury in Southern California" (116) – they scare her away by performing threats of violence to one another, the ultimate outcome of which would be that the winner, naturally, gets the girl (124).

[16] After Acosta's death, Thompson wrote of this mission to find an impossible identity, noting "the almost desperate sense of failure and loss that he [Acosta] felt when he was suddenly confronted with the stark possibility that he had never really been chosen to speak for anybody, except maybe himself – and even that was beginning to look like a halfway impossible task, in the short time he felt he had left. … The truth was not in him, goddamnit! He was put on this earth for no reason at all except to shit in every nest he could con his way into – but only after robbing them first, and selling the babies to sand-niggers. If that treacherous fist-fucker ever comes back to life, he'll wish we'd had the good sense to nail him up on a frozen telephone pole for his thirty-third birthday present" ("The Banshee" 532).

then, a self-negating bildungsroman that ends in an affirmation of a kind of negative identity: "I am a Chicano by ancestry and a Brown Buffalo by choice" (199). Through his "individual lunatic writing" (G. Wright 625), Oscar provides "no specifics for any of the future Brown Buffalo people and little more unity than a sense of opposition to everyone" (G. Wright 629). Yet his establishment of this negative identity is the first crucial step in a performative strategy taken up by *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*, Acosta's second – now 'autobiographical' rather than simply autobiographical – novel.

Before we move on to *The Revolt* in order to understand how Acosta shifts from the identity problematic to *performing* a kind of erasure of the human horizon through further embellishing his grotesque strategy, let us look briefly at a scene from Thompson's *FLLV* in order to understand some of the problems associated with identity politics and its carnivalesque *representational* strategy.

Circus-Circus: A Detour

Relatively early in Thompson's text, after they have arrived in Las Vegas, Raoul Duke and Dr. Gonzo make their way to Circus-Circus, the largest permanent big top in the world and "the vortex" (47) and "the main nerve" of the American Dream (48) that represents "what the whole hep world would be doing on Saturday night if the Nazis had won the war" (46). High on, among other drugs, "ether" – a drug that allows one to be a literal mindless body as it severs "all connection between the body and the brain" so that "you can actually *watch* yourself behaving in this terrible way, but you can't control it" (45) – they enter the casino. "Ah, devil ether," Thompson writes, "a total body drug. The mind recoils in horror, unable to communicate with the spinal column. The hands flap crazily, unable to get money out of the pocket … garbled

laughter and hissing from the mouth … always smiling" (46). He concludes: "Ether is the perfect drug for Las Vegas. In this town they love a drunk. Fresh meat. So they put us through the turnstiles and turned us loose inside" (46).

The casino floor of Circus-Circus is a veritable hodgepodge of carnivalesque tropes and images, as "all manner of strange County-Fair/Polish Carnival madness is going on up in this space" (46). Here, Thompson, describing the atmosphere of the casino, adopts the language and images of what Bakhtin calls "popular festive forms" (*Rabelais* 196), of games and carnivals, which historically presented life "as a miniature play" that "drew the players out of the bounds of everyday life, liberated them from usual laws and regulations, and replaced established conventions by other lighter conventionalities" (*Rabelais* 235). So, in Thompson's Circus-Circus scene, "right above the gambling tables,"

> the stakes are getting high when suddenly you chance to look up, and there, right smack above your head is a half-naked fourteen-year-old girl being chased through the air by a snarling wolverine, which is suddenly locked in a death battle with two silver-painted Polacks who come swinging down from the opposite balconies and meet in mid-air on the wolverine's neck. (46)

While the typical reaction in Bakhtin's reading of the carnival is life-affirming laughter, the result of the immersion in the carnival atmosphere in Thompson is "the Fear" (47), a kind of "fearful intensity that comes at the peak of a mescaline seizure" (48); except that "one can handle" hallucinations brought on by acid, while "*nobody* can handle that other trip – the possibility that any freak with $1.98 can walk into the Circus-Circus and suddenly appear in the sky over downtown Las Vegas twelve times the size of God, howling anything that comes into his head. … Reality itself is [here] too twisted" (47).

Importantly, this Carnival of *FLLV* often goes – consciously, at least – unnoticed by everyone, and while "the circus never ends … the customers are being hustled by every conceivable kind of bizarre shuck" (46). In this carnivalesque, Fear-inducing atmosphere, the "countercultural drug user is domesticated and ultimately erased by the true crazies of the US – tourists" and, more importantly, consumers (Banco 138): "In a town full of bedrock-crazies," writes Thompson, "nobody even *notices* an acid freak" (24). Aside from the reactionary aspects of carnivalesque political energy, then, the contemporary US capitalist setting substantially neuters the subversive impetus of the carnivalesque, described in the first half of the twentieth century by Mikhail Bakhtin as "consecrat[ing] inventive freedom" and "liberat[ing us] from the prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted" (*Rabelais* 34). As both Slavoj Žižek and Brian Massumi point out, the contemporary world's hegemonic order is, to an important degree, premised upon the carnivalisation of everyday life that, in this context, becomes the source of a kind of ever-renewing stream of the 'new' and 'different' – often successfully marketed as countercultural – consumer products [Figure 5], an ever-renewing stream of every conceivable kind of bizarre shuck[17].

Figure 5: Apple's "Think different" campaign image (1997)

[17] Witness, for example, the relatively new consumer brand – "Obey" – which proudly proclaims that it has been "manufacturing quality dissent since 1989." Its website <http://www.obeygiant.com>, for example supports the Occupy movement, and the brand's "Manifesto" appropriates philosophical and cultural-theory

vocabulary in order to project a kind of informed, countercultural ethos: “The OBEY sticker campaign can be explained as an experiment in Phenomenology. Heidegger describes Phenomenology as “the process of letting things manifest themselves.” Phenomenology attempts to enable people to see clearly something that is right before their eyes but obscured; things that are so taken for granted that they are muted by abstract observation.

“The FIRST AIM OF PHENOMENOLOGY is to reawaken a sense of wonder about one’s environment. The OBEY sticker attempts to stimulate curiosity and bring people to question both the sticker and their relationship with their surroundings. Because people are not used to seeing advertisements or propaganda for which the product or motive is not obvious, frequent and novel encounters with the sticker provoke thought and possible frustration, nevertheless revitalizing the viewer’s perception and attention to detail. The sticker has no meaning but exists only to cause people to react, to contemplate and search for meaning in the sticker. Because OBEY has no actual meaning, the various reactions and interpretations of those who view it reflect their personality and the nature of their sensibilities.

“Many people who are familiar with the sticker find the image itself amusing, recognizing it as nonsensical, and are able to derive straightforward visual pleasure without burdening themselves with an explanation. The PARANOID OR CONSERVATIVE VIEWER however may be confused by the sticker’s persistent presence and condemn it as an underground cult with subversive intentions. Many stickers have been peeled down by people who were annoyed by them, considering them an eye sore and an act of petty vandalism, which is ironic considering the number of commercial graphic images everyone in American society is assaulted with daily.

“Another phenomenon the sticker has brought to light is the trendy and CONSPICUOUSLY CONSUMPTIVE nature of many members of society. For those who have been surrounded by the sticker, its familiarity and cultural resonance is comforting and owning a sticker provides a souvenir or keepsake, a memento. People have often demanded the sticker merely because they have seen it everywhere and possessing a sticker provides a sense of belonging. The Giant sticker seems mostly to be embraced by those who are (or at least want to seem to be) rebellious. Even though these people may not know the meaning of the sticker, they enjoy its slightly disruptive underground quality and wish to contribute to the furthering of its humorous and absurd presence which seems to somehow be antiestablishment/ societal convention. Giant stickers are both embraced and rejected, the reason behind which, upon examination reflects the psyche of the viewer. Whether the reaction be positive or negative, the stickers existence is worthy as long as it causes people to consider the details and meanings of their surroundings. In the name of fun and observation.”

A shorter version of the manifesto, found on the company’s merchandise, is even more baffling: “The OBEY campaign can be explained as an experiment in Phenomenology. The first aim of Phenomenology is to reawaken a sense of wonder about one’s environment. The OBEY campaign attempts to stimulate curiosity and bring people to question both the campaign and their relationship with their surroundings. Because people are not used to seeing advertisements or propaganda for which the motive is not obvious, frequent and novel

Hence, Bakhtin's insights that the carnivalesque is liberatory, that its laughter is "also directed at those who laugh" as "people [who laugh] do not exclude themselves from the wholeness of the world" (*Rabelais* 12), that it relies on the grotesque presentation of the body, and that "abusive language" is essential to its functioning (27) are, in gonzo strategies of Thompson and Acosta, honed in such a way as to respond to contemporary capitalism's carnivalisation of everyday life. These strategies, however, do not transcend the ambiguous nature of the carnivalesque in capitalist culture, even if they draw attention to it. So, Duke and Dr. Gonzo ingest ether as a part of their countercultural odyssey celebrating "Free Enterprise," "The American Dream," "Horatio Alger gone mad on drugs in Las Vegas" and "pure Gonzo journalism" (12).

"Every now and then," Thompson/Duke muses, "when your life gets complicated and the weasels start closing in, the only real cure is to load up on heinous chemicals and then drive like a bastard from Hollywood to Las Vegas. To *relax*, as it were, in the womb of the desert sun. Just roll the roof back and screw it on, grease the face with white tanning butter and move out with the music at top volume, and at least a pint of ether" (12). Yet, precisely because of this, as a consequence of their drug-imbued trip, "Las Vegas … thinks they are merely drunk and lets them enter its casinos. In embracing them as fuel for its capitalist machinery, Vegas tames their alienating narcotic and brings their drug-inflected marginality into the mainstream" (Banco 139). As Lindsey Michael Banco continues, writing of *FLLV* in the context of "anti-tourism,"

> Going to Las Vegas to perform one's drug-addled assault on mainstream tourism is doomed to failure because drugs never signal absolutely or even reliably; depending on

---

encounters with OBEY PROPAGANDA provoke thought and possible frustration, never the less revitalizing the viewers perception and attention to detail. To catalyze a thoughtful dialogue deconstructing the process of image absorption is the ultimate goal. All in the name of fun and observation. The medium is the message."

> the economic or cultural machinery at work beyond the drug tourist's control, drugs can easily be domesticated. The depictions of drug use in *Fear and Loathing* are often understood as celebratory – and rightfully so, at times. … But Thompson … invests drug representation with a pathological extremity that undermines not only the hedonistic depravity of the pursuit of the American Dream but also its purported antidote: the countercultural dreams of the sixties. (139)

The problem with the carnivalesque, then, is not just that it is ultimately ambiguous: potentially both progressive and reactionary. More importantly, its problem today is that it is so easily domesticated and deployed by the hegemonic socio-political order depicted in both Acosta's and Thompson's works.

Identity politics, whether represented in terms of carnivalesque-grotesque aesthetic categories or not, presents similar problems. The reason Oscar cannot present any "specifics for any of the future Brown Buffalo people and little more unity than a sense of opposition to everyone" (G. Wright 629) is precisely that identity politics is, in the context of contemporary global capitalism, ultimately ineffectual, even if quite often tactically valuable (consider here the Punk subjectivity explored in the previous chapter). Irrespective of whether it is rooted in the representations of the beautiful "pigtailed, blue-eyed girls from America" (*The Autobiography* 95), or in those of the sublime "truth [of] highly idealized visions of an … indigenous past" (Hames-Garcia 466), or in the carnivalesque-grotesque body of "a gorilla," "the beast" that Oscar literally becomes under the influence of drugs (*The Autobiography* 164), identity politics is in the contemporary moment always finally reduced to the politics of the body as "the only concrete instance for productive individuals aspiring to enjoyment" (Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*

2)[18]. As I will further discuss in the next chapter, this focus on the politics of the body is the basis of the ideology of multiculturalism, which, Žižek argues, is "the ideal form of ideology of … global capitalism[19]" ("Multiculturalism" 44). Demanding that a "language that does not recognize the universal and juridical and normative equality of languages does not deserve to benefit from this equality" (Badiou, *Logics of Worlds* 2), this ideology is here "the privileged *empty point of universality* from which one is able to appreciate (and depreciate) properly other … cultures" (Žižek, "Multiculturalism" 44).

There are at least two possible solutions to overcoming this limitation: a commitment to a kind of Platonism evident in Badiou's notion of the immaterial event (with which the ontological elaboration of the grotesque forms links), and/or a more radical commitment to the materiality of the body. From the perspective of the grotesque, the reason that identity politics is reduced to

---

[18] As Žižek convincingly argues throughout his *oeuvre*, "Enjoy!" is *the* superego injunction of the contemporary capitalist moment.

[19] "The ideal form of ideology of this global capitalism is multiculturalism, the attitude which, from a kind of empty global position, treats *each* local culture the way the colonizer treats colonized people – as 'natives' whose mores are to be carefully studied and 'respected.' That is to say, the relationship between traditional imperialist colonialism and global capitalist self-colonization is exactly the same as the relationship between Western cultural imperialism and multiculturalism: in the same way that global capitalism involves the paradox of colonization without the colonizing Nation-State metropole, multi-culturalism involves patronizing Eurocentrist distance and/or respect for local cultures without roots in one's own particular culture. In other words, multiculturalism is a disavowed, inverted, self-referential form of racism, a 'racism with a distance' – It 'respects' the Other's identity, conceiving the Other as a self-enclosed 'authentic' community towards which he, the multiculturalist, maintains a distance rendered possible by his privileged universal position. Multiculturalism is a racism which empties its own position of all positive content (the multiculturalist is not a direct racist, he doesn't oppose to the Other the *particular* values of his own culture), but nonetheless retains this position as the privileged *empty point of universality* from which one is able to appreciate (and depreciate) properly other particular cultures – the multiculturalist respect for the Other's specificity is the very form of asserting one's own superiority" (44).

(rather than, say, 'made adequate to') the politics of the body is not that the body is here concretised too much, that identity politics is, in the contemporary world, rooted in the body's matter-iality at the expense of its non-material aspects. Rather, the problem is that the body, that wo/man, is not reduced to its matter-iality radically enough. The problem, in other words, is that the body's matter-iality is always-already 'contaminated' by a supplement through the logic of correlationism according to which "there is a necessary reciprocity between mind and nature," and which "hankers after second nature precisely insofar as the achievement of the latter would render material reality into a depository of sense fully commensurate with man's psychic needs" (Brassier, *Nihil* 40).

Back to Brown

In light of this problem associated with the politics of identity, Acosta's *Autobiography* paves the way for *The Revolt* in which the carnivalesque exposition of oppositional identity persists but is shown to be functional only in the Symbolic register (where it can be and often is, as I already noted, tactically useful in political struggle). Conversely, the grotesque treatment of the body is in *The Revolt* pushed beyond its carnivalesque iteration in order to reveal an a-human (or, as Brassier terms it, *alien*) horizon of matter-iality as Real. This register allows us to be "passive before the Real, letting it be, thinking alongside it" through "pure description" (Mullarkey 145). The genealogy of this space for thought reaches back to, at the very least, Kant's noumena and Hegel's dialectic; and it is within/from this space that we will be in a position to draw the conceptualisation of the grotesque Real back into a relationship with the Imaginary-Symbolic which has "not [been] negated by what follow[ed] it, but [has] simply [been] crossed out, and as such, [has always] remain[ed] visible beneath" (Mullarkey 160).

As noted above, this a-human horizon of matter-iality as Real is revealed via Acosta's (and Thompson's) use of the aesthetics of gonzo presentation – a kind of textual-imagistic performance of an assault upon the human body. The grotesque/assaulted body is here, to repeat, a knot tying together multiple acts of narrated transgression, or law-breaking, a knot whose ultimate function is dually and trans-narratively transgressive, or Law-breaking. This means that via this body, Acosta's texts try to create/depict an actual-virtual dynamic between (actual) law and (virtual) justice – a dynamic which here stands in for/is isomorphic to the previously discussed triadic structure of the grotesque, corporeal-ontological-Multiplicity. This dynamic is of the Symbolic and, hence, correlational/Decisional, as well as motivated by a perceived failure of justice post-1968. Furthermore, this failure of justice as diagrammed by a grotesque Chicano body of Robert Fernandez is simultaneously a revealing of the realm of the Real, accomplished in two steps: firstly, as grotesque imagistic language performs transgression on the level of Symbolic reality temporarily nullifying language's function as transmitter of meaning in favour of use of language as information; and secondly, as a corollary of the first transgression, as grotesque-imagistic language reveals/diagrams the a-human horizon of matter in-itself as autonomous, a horizon "of separability of thought and being, their non-correlation" (Brassier, *Nihil Unbound* 84), through which Symbolic Law can be augmented.

The instances of gonzo-carnivalesque law-breaking in both Acosta and Thompson are almost always related to alcohol and drug consumption[20]. Duke and Dr. Gonzo's episode in Circus-Circus is only one example of this praxis which is always a part of the gonzo mission to

[20] As Bruce-Novoa, however, points out, Acosta "imaginary conversations and visions go beyond Thompson's in that they also happen without drugs. Acosta creates his image as a madman, whose hallucinations are attributable to mental disorder. Whereas Thompson sees strange transformations or invents them to fool others, Oscar transforms himself into a monster" (45).

"stir up something to observe" and report on, whether journalistically or autobiographically (G. Wright 632). The two most obvious examples of this, aside from the Circus-Circus episode, are Oscar's first mescaline trip with Ted Casey, Bertha, and Maryjane in a San Francisco club that visually plays out like a Hieronymus Bosch painting (*The Autobiography* 60 – 70), and Duke and Gonzo's "subversive[ ] furthering [of] drug fiend mythology among the district attorneys at the drug conference [in Las Vegas], spreading disinformation for the amusement of acid freaks everywhere" (Banco 139). These and other examples of carnivalesque transgression in the Symbolic realm of the law, in both Acosta's and Thompson's texts, paradoxically perform what Jacques Derrida refers to as *acts of justice*, which "must always concern singularity, individuals, irreplaceable groups and lives … in a unique situation," in contradistinction to *the law*, "which necessarily ha[s] a general form, even if this generality prescribes a singular application in each case" (17)[21]. Each of these acts of justice "must, in its proper moment if there is one, be both regulated and without regulation: it must conserve the law and also destroy it or suspend it enough to have to reinvent it in each case, rejustify it, at least reinvent it in the reaffirmation and the new and free confirmation of its principle" (Derrida 23). As such, acts of justice show that, paradoxically in a typically deconstructionist manner, "there is never a moment that we can say *in the present* that a decision *is* just" (23). This goes part of the way toward explaining why these acts of transgression – despite their potential for subversiveness – are so easily domesticated. As Banco notes, drugs "never signal absolutely or even reliably" (139), and they are therefore easily entangled into webs of interpretation and meaning that are always contestable. This does not, of course, mean that there is no such thing as moments of actual

[21] See also Greg Wright's pointed analysis of Acosta's and Thompson's texts in "The Literary, Political, and Legal Strategies of Oscar Zeta Acosta and Hunter S. Thompson," which also uses Derrida's conceptualisation of justice in its discussion of the two authors.

justice. It simply means that, within the Symbolic realm, justice is always deeply related to an actual legal context, which is perfectly illustrated by the above-quoted speech in which MLK calls upon the US to "be true to what [it] said on paper."

Nevertheless, these acts of transgression also create a possibility for genuine, if often short-lived, subversion as they directly participate in the Symbolic-correlationist realm characterized by a quasi-Deleuzean interplay between the virtual and the actual in which the *virtual singularity of justice* always allows for transformation in the *actual generality of law*. Oscar's flight from the actuality of the legal profession, described in terms of a petty-bureaucratic ability to "make motions, requests, and even demands from the superior court with that little piece of brittle paper" that is "the emblem of [his] title: An Attorney and Counselor at Law" early in *The Autobiography* (29), is a flight from the ubiquitous (actual) order represented by "Governor Reagan and his Welfare Department" (28). The carnivalesque-grotesque trip that separates this flight from Oscar's return to the legal profession as "Zeta, the world-famous Chicano Lawyer who helped to start the last revolution" (199) at the conclusion of the same text makes apparent the correlationist relationship between virtual justice and the actual law and sets the stage for the repeated legal wranglings of *The Revolt*.

The carnivalesque transformation of Oscar's self-understanding through which he resists pastoral power and learns to see value in his being a "degenerate object" (Aldama 69) is, therefore, simultaneously a recognition of the correlation between acts of justice and the rule of law. As Aldama writes:

> The Acosta-as-character's hypervisibility as abnormal/unreal ethnosexual object ironically leads him into an empowered ethnosexual position that playfully resists hegemonic structures. … The character's emergence into a fluid non-disjunctive

> subjectivity is to be identified with the narrator of the story *in toto* – a narrator who amplifies and reveals the mechanisms that operate in a U.S. consumer culture and naturalize late capital's spectacularization of society. (71)

It is Acosta-as-narrator, then, who becomes Zeta, "the world-famous Chicano lawyer" and the protagonist of *The Revolt*. And it is Zeta who, throughout *The Revolt*, tests out different means of opening up the actuality of law onto the virtuality of justice. In the very first chapter of Acosta's second novel, for example, we witness Zeta's participation in "the first religious war in America" (21) through which the boundaries of legal actuality are first tested:

> [On] Christmas Eve in the year of Huitzilpochtli, 1969 … [t]hree hundred Chicanos have gathered in front of St. Basil's Roman Catholic Church … to drive the money-changers out of the richest temple in Los Angeles. … We carry little white candles as weapons. In pairs on the sidewalk, we trickle and bump and sing … like a bunch of cockroaches gone crazy. I am walking around giving orders like a drill sergeant. (11)

The proud yet ill-treated Buffalo of *The Autobiography* has here been morphed into a swarm of cockroaches – paralleling the change in the (grotesque) presentation of the body between the two novels – and the identity problematic has been sublated into the problematic of communal struggle: "All around us," Zeta narrates, "insurance companies with patriotic names are housed in gigantic towers of white plaster" and

> prestigious law firms perform their business for rich people who live next to jaded movie stars. The Bank of America, Coast Federal Savings, and all those other money institutions that sit in judgment over our lives, keep the vaults across the street behind solid locks. But the personalized checkbooks now sit on the pews of St. Basil's, under

> siege by a gang of cockroaches from east Los Angeles River, from a "Mexican-American" barrio there called Tooner Flats. (12)

This struggle is, furthermore, not simply national – it is global: "We were at the home base of the holy man who encouraged presidents to drop fire on poor Cockroaches in far-off villages in Vietnam" (13), narrates Zeta.

The possibility of this kind of group engagement based on an affirmation of a kind of negative or oppositional identity (the 'we' as 'cockroaches') is premised on a very particular engagement with the third component of a conceptual triangle whose two primary apexes are here represented simply as 'us' and 'them.' This third component is 'the law,' conceived dynamically and correlationally as 'justice-law' of 'our' world: "Acosta," writes Hames-Garcia, "believed that action within the existing legal system by itself was insufficient for achieving the liberation of the oppressed. He believed that to be truly effective, action had to aim at the reconstitution of the legal system in keeping with a standard of justice external to that system" and with a "broader notion of justice" (483). The us/them binary is thereby transformed into a tripartite dialectical structure through which broader notions of justice sweep up this binary in a reconstitution of the whole as *our* world.

The most notorious legal episodes of *The Revolt* are a direct attempt to effectuate the correlation between justice and law by violently, and often comically, ripping open the fabric of law's actuality via gonzo praxes in order to effectuate this broader notion of justice. So, for example, Zeta transforms the "trial of the St. Basil Twenty-One" into "the best show in town" through a combination of legal argument and showmanship for which he is held in contempt of court ten times (156). The most important of these exhibitions through which Zeta's body, looking "like shit" (205), becomes the ligature between "the icebox of justice" and "the garbage"

outside its limits (204 – 205), is his subpoenaing and cross-examination of "any and all trial judges of the Superior Court" of Los Angeles (214) in order to "demonstrate racial and ethnic bias in the selection of the Grand Jury" (Hames-Garcia 484). In the historical event upon which this episode of *The Revolt* is based, Acosta "argued that there were criteria for serving on a Grand Jury that lay *beyond the 'legal' qualifications* – criteria such as that a Grand Juror must 'be a friend of a Judge, or a friend of a friend of a Judge'" (484, emphasis added). As Acosta himself stressed, he "was not arguing that the Judges wake up every morning and say, 'I'm not going to look for any Mexicans today.' … What is pathetic, tragic, is that none of them know any" (qtd. in Hames-Garcia 484). In this manner, Acosta (and Zeta) reveals a "blind spot in the U.S. courts" that makes its legal apparatus incapable of "address[ing] the way discrimination, exploitation, and material disadvantage are produced and perpetuated" outside its system and, more importantly, as this "justice system's own material conditions of existence" (485).

Zeta's mission as "the only revolutionary lawyer this side of the Florida Gulf" and "the only [lawyer] who actually hates the *law*" (*The Revolt* 214) thus becomes to reveal this blind spot by "imagin[ing] the possibility for radical justice and substantive equality that the existing social order promises but does not deliver," thereby "transcend[ing] the limits of the existing legal order" (Hames-Garcia 485): he says to the US, "be true to what you said on paper." In the courthouse, now become his "lair," Zeta consequently tries to navigate between the Scylla of what Superior Court Judges "*say* and *do*" while "they look like ordinary … older men of America" (*The Revolt* 221 – 222), and the Charybdis of a carnival gone amok as represented by the supporters of "Charles Manson, the nut who allegedly masterminded the massacre of several movie stars, including one with an embryo in her fat belly" (215). Manson, mentioned more than once in *The Revolt* and three times in Thompson's *FLLV* (5, 106, 148), is here the law-

without-justice's reactionary double, an "Abject Hero" that Michael André Bernstein describes as embodying "the viciousness that can be released by the carnival's dissolution of the accumulated prudential understanding of a culture" (9). "[W]hen the tropes of a Saturnalian reversal of all values spill over into daily life," he writes, "they usually do so with a savagery that is the grim underside of their exuberant affirmations" (6) that is both the antithesis of carnivalesque's "optimistic and celebratory assumptions" and its extension (18). The other side of the actual law's "tired older men of America" (*The Revolt* 221) are, thus, "young kids, high on weird drugs, the Vietnam war and hard rock, under the influence of this stud [Manson] who fucked minds as well as dead bodies, that *allegedly* they had, you know, decapitated, mutilated, and desecrated the bodies of beautiful Jet-Setters and a fetus trying to get off the ground" (215).

To steer his way between these two (mutually defining and supporting) forces, Zeta must complement carnivalesque's engagement with the body (elaborated in *The Autobiography* and discussed above) with the conceptualization of 'the law' as justice-law, which further stresses the contemporary grotesque's conceptualisation as that which even while it is metamorphosing continues to invoke structure as persisting and which highlights this form's insight into the univocity of 'our' world[22]. As Marcia Chamberlain notes in her discussion of Oscar's fat body, "[f]at, according to the President's Council on Physical Fitness at the time [early 1970s], was distinctly un-American. And fat minorities were seen as a particularly cruel affront to a picture-perfect nation" (93). As such, Oscar' gonzo carnivalisation of his own body is directly a "display in large print … of various societal forces at work" (97), the force of 'the law' being at

[22] By trying to get to know/work the system they hate, Acosta and Thompson are here kinds of doppelgängers to the Reaganite rugged individual who hates the system but knows how to work it. As such, Acosta and Thompson are, to an extent, dialectically enacting the next stage of American capitalism, what we can here call the Reaganite grotesque, further showing the way in which the contemporary grotesque depicts 'their' world as our own (I am thankful to Marcus Boon for this observation).

the forefront of Oscar's and, then, Zeta's (and Thompson's) engagement with the USA's legal-cultural landscape. Therefore, the *language* of this carnivalesque (and subsequently grotesque) representation (and presentation), as the medium through which Oscar/Zeta/ Acosta chooses to steer between the Scylla and the Charybdis of this legal-cultural landscape, plays an important role in the grotesque gonzo performances of Acosta and Thompson's texts.

Step 1: Watch Your Language

There are at least two different regimes of signs in Acosta's autobiographical novels, two "specific formalizations of [linguistic] expression" (or two forms of expression) that are "simultaneously inseparable from and independent of" (Deleuze and Guattari, *ATP* 111) these novels' primary form of content: the grotesque body. Both these forms of expression "pertain to assemblages that are not principally linguistic" (111). The Bakhtinian carnivalesque-grotesque form of expression that dominates *The Autobiography* and is carried over into *The Revolt* pertains to the Symbolic *representation* of the body and its relationship to, at first, the actuality of law and, then, the virtuality-actuality of justice-law. The grotesque form of expression that, negatively, arises out of the carnivalesque body's interaction with (the virtual-actual) justice-law, on the other hand, pertains to the matter-ial Real *presentation/naming* of the body that, paradoxically, falls outside of the Symbolic order/discourse while exerting a direct effect upon it unilaterally[23]. Unlike the first form of expression, it is present only in *The Revolt*.

[23] This dynamic is, admittedly, already present in Bakhtin's conceptualization of the grotesque, which is theorised both as an enactment of primordial cyclical transformation and then a specific resistance to the hegemony of the Medieval church (I am, again, thankful to Marcus Boon for this observation). The important difference here is that in the present case, the matter-ial Real *presentation/naming* of the body that, paradoxically, falls outside of the Symbolic order/discourse while exerting a direct effect upon it unilaterally is a kind of retroactive positing of matter through processes of thought. Laruelle (and Brassier) calls this process

The representation of the carnivalesque body (as the first form of expression) in Acosta's novels depends largely on the ambiguity of the carnivalesque mode of representation. From the very beginning of *The Autobiography*, the "degenerate object" (Aldama 69) that is Oscar's body is the locus of a struggle of interpretation: the body, here, *signifies*. The "apparently anarchic plot" of this novel, so "self-indulgent and digressive" yet so "crucial to the transformation of Acosta's character" (Calderón 107) is a dramatization of this struggle over the meaning of Oscar's and other brown bodies. The language through which the carnivalesque body is represented, thus, indexes this struggle of meaning through confrontational and oppositional strategies of gonzo writing evident in both Acosta's and Thompson's texts.

The most important characteristics of this oppositional writing are premised on undermining the effects of what Deleuze and Guattari call "the order-word" – "the elementary unit of language" (76) whose primary aim is to "legislate[ ] by constants, prohibiting or strictly limiting metamorphoses, giving figures clear and stable contours, setting forms in opposition two by two and requiring subjects to die in order to pass from one form to the other" (107). In other words, the elementary function of (this, "majoritarian," use of) language as a set of order-words is the maintenance and reproduction of its maximally stable, actual, form. In contrast, gonzo narrative deploys a series of strategies in an attempt to destabilise this function of the order-word, to "elude the death-sentence it envelops" and "develop its power of escape" in order to "maintain or draw out the revolutionary potentiality of the order-word" (110). This means that what Deleuze and Guattari call the majoritarian use of language – or the order-word – aims to "compel

---

cloning. See Laruelle 180, and Brassier's "Alien Theory" 127ff for a reading of this concept which "is an operation of radical immanence in so far as it takes on a transcendental relation to a given datum that has the form of the world, transforming that datum into a material by virtue of the very fact that it is *other than ... it*" (Laruelle 180).

obedience" (*ATP* 76) through a dispersal of *information*, information being "the strict minimum necessary for the emission, transmission, and observation of orders as commands" (76). "We are trained, disciplined and docilised," writes Bruce McClure,

> to the point that we tend not to be particularly aware of [this] 'abominable faculty' that has been instilled in us. … This semiotization occurs through the interlocking of the rules of linguistic and paralinguistic expression on the one hand, which have as much to do with gesture, facial expression and posture as to do with word order, matching tenses and the like, and on the other hand, the networks of social practices (such as the way the day is divided up into work time and free time, or the differing etiquette of communication with peers, elders and juniors) *segmentalised* with appropriate behaviours for each situation. (Chapter 3)

Language, hence, as a conservative transmission of order-words, is the propagation of what Bakhtin calls the language's centripetal forces. Characterized by "imposing specific limits," "guaranteeing a certain maximum of mutual understanding and crystalizing into a real, although still relative, unity," these forces mark language as "ideologically saturated," as "a world view … insuring a *maximum* of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life," a world view that "gives expression to forces working toward concrete verbal and ideological unification and centralization, which develop in vital connection with the processes of sociopolitical and cultural centralization" (Bakhtin, "Discourse" 270 – 271). This kind of language, then, participates in the production of what Foucault calls a "docile body" (*Discipline and Punish* 138), a body that is made both "intelligible" through its "functioning and explanation" (at the level of what Deleuze and Guattari would call expression) and "useful" through "submission and use" (at the level of content) (*Discipline and Punish* 136).

In light of this discussion, Oscar's body, at the beginning of but also throughout *The Autobiography*, does two-things-in-one: it (a) *indexes* the way in which forms of expression and forms of content weave into one another as "the warp of the instantaneous [incorporeal-linguistic] transformations is … inserted into the woof of the continuous [corporeal] modifications" (*ATP* 86) by (b) *performing* (and/or representing) the corporeal effects – constipation, vomiting, bleeding, metamorphosis and deformation of the body – of the linguistic-Symbolic order whose limits are enforced by juridical order-words, and which, at the beginning of this text, "mean[s] the limits of [Oscar's] world" (Wittgenstein 68). Acosta therefore insists that "the accumulation of acids and ulcers in his stomach is not a psychological reaction to an individual troubled past" but "a 'normal' gag response to the nation's … policing of *bodies and borders*" (Chamberlain 102, emphasis added).

This kind of "[f]ood loathing," writes Julia Kristeva in her study of abjection, "is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of" this state (2), which "*show[s] me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. … There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. … It is no longer I who expel, 'I' is expelled. The border has become an object" (3 – 4). Oscar's vomiting, initiated by his internalisation of "the white gaze's abnormalization of the brown subject" through which he "becomes an unruly bodily mass of brown flesh that consumes white images – and foodstuffs" (Aldama 69), is here precisely the kind of abjection that Kristeva writes of. Oscar's individual development into first a Brown Buffalo and then a swarm of cockroaches throughout *The Autobiography* and *The Revolt* is, then, an act of "giv[ing] birth to [one]self amid the violence of sobs, of vomit. Mute protests of the symptom, shattering violence of a convulsion" are here "inscribed in a symbolic system … without either wanting or being able to become [fully] integrated" (Kristeva 3). In this way, then, through abjection, Acosta-as-

narrator (Zeta) persistently "makes clear that what he is regurgitating is never just spoiled pork tamales or bad feelings about his mother but the indifference, poverty, and oppression … forced down the throats" of all cockroaches, including and especially those of Mexican origin in the United States of America (Chamberlain 102 – 103)

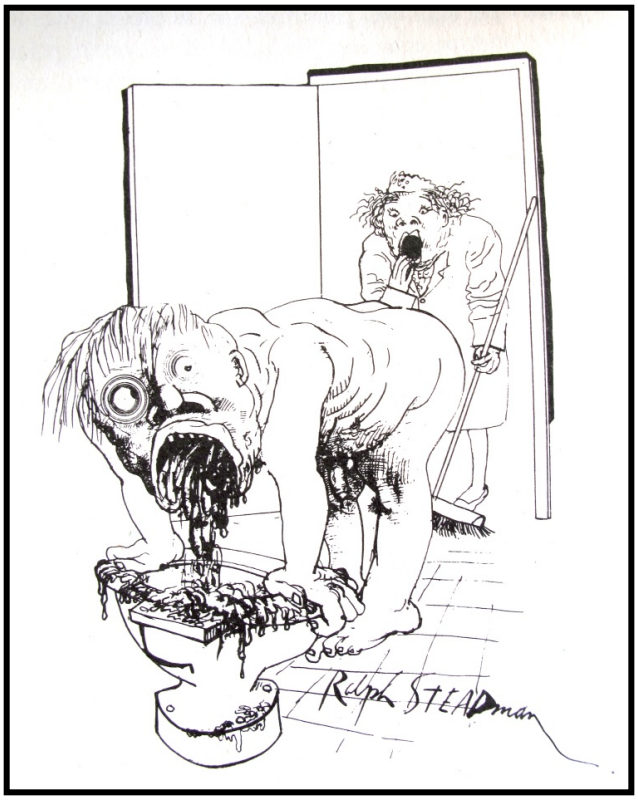


Figure 6: Steadman's vomiting Gonzo/Acosta (*FLLV* 97)

In *The Autobiography*, then, on the level of the first form of expression, Oscar combats the "power (*pouvoir*) of constants" of the majoritarian use of order-words (parallel to the actual order of law) with the "power (*puissance*) of variation" (*ATP* 101) deployed by the gonzo-carnivalesque narrative strategy, in the hope of not eluding the order word, but rather of drawing out its "revolutionary potentiality" (parallel to the instantiation of 'the law' as justice-law) (*ATP* 110). Writing of Thompson's *FLLV*, but equally applicable to Acosta'a novels, Bruce-Novoa notes the following narrative strategies as characterising what we can here call the gonzo-carnivalesque via which this "revolutionary potentiality" of the order word is activated: a) temporal digression, which "fuses [disparate] temporal planes into the only real present possible in the text, that of the reading[24]," and which simultaneously "allow[s] Thompson [and Acosta] to invent some of [their] most violent or insane passages" (41); b) the juxtaposition of real and imaginary events, which "effectively puts readers on the edge between

[24] This is similar to Moore's fourth dimension explored in the previous chapter.

reality and invention, and then spins them until they lose their sense of direction" (42); c) hyperbole and grotesque exaggeration, "often linked to drugs and alcohol consumption" (42); and, most importantly for the present discussion, d) the juxtaposition of disparate levels of diction, which "undermine[s] the inherent order of grammar," "form[s] a rhetoric of chaos within the order of language," and "aim[s] at creating visual and rhythmic alterations" that depict "chaos, violence, disintegration, proliferation of inhuman proportions, [and] absurdity" (42). All these strategies contribute to the subversion the majoritarian use of the order-word by extracting from it a minoritarian use of language "torn from sense" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 2). In other words, these strategies activate the centrifugal forces of language that further its "decentralization and disunification" (Bakhtin, "Discourse" 272) and which are often "parodic, and aimed sharply and polemically against the official languages of [their] given time" (Bakhtin, "Discourse" 273).

In Thompson's *FLLV*, this function of language is often accompanied by illustrations by Thompson's long-time collaborator, Ralph Steadman, and is consistently deployed in sections which present the effects of the real and, importantly, mythical hallucinogens – such as the Transcendental Adrenochrome – by describing the effects of drugs upon the minds and bodies of Duke and Gonzo [Figures 4 and 6]: "Man, your head would swell up like a watermelon," notes Dr. Gonzo of the effects of the extract of the pineal gland, "claws, bleeding warts, then you'd notice about six huge hairy tits swelling up on your back" (132). These kinds of descriptions – also notable in Acosta's *Autobiography* in the above-mentioned mescaline trip in a San Francisco club that visually plays out like a Hieronymus Bosch painting (60 – 70) – are distortions of language-as-transmitter-of-meaning through monstrous imagings. Furthermore, they are in both Thompson and in Acosta always instances of what Deleuze and Guattari call

"collective enunciation" (*Kafka* 84) which join the actual drug user (Duke and Gonzo) with the virtual community of "acid freaks everywhere" (Banco 139), "both of them real … [and] the components of a collective assemblage" (*Kafka* 84).

Interestingly, this use of language is deliberately performed in Thompson's text when Duke and Dr. Gonzo attend the district attorneys' drug conference in what Banco describes as "subversive[ ] furthering [of] drug fiend mythology" (139). Here, the two consciously perform the roles they have selected for themselves, bringing their Gonzo ethos into the realm of a kind of hyperreality: "[T]his time our very *presence* would be an outrage," narrates Duke.

> We would be attending the conference under false pretenses and dealing, from the start, with a crowd that was convened for the stated purpose of putting people like us in jail. We *were* the menace – not in disguise, but stone-obvious drug abusers with a flagrantly cranked-up act that we intended to push all the way to the limit … not to prove any final, sociological point and not even as a conscious mockery: It was mainly a matter of life-style, a sense of obligation and even duty. (109 – 110)

At the conference, Duke and Gonzo spread rumours of "addicts gone crazy for human sacrifice" who "chopped [a waitress's] goddamn head off" and "cut all kinds of holes in her and sucked out the blood" (146). By hyper-inflating the language of the common urban myth of the drug fiend, Duke and Gonzo quite literally perform, in front of their audience within the text and for the audience without it, the parodic function of language "aimed sharply and polemically against the official languages of [their] given time" (Bakhtin, "Discourse" 273).

This distortion of forms of expression is, furthermore, "inserted into the woof of the continuous [corporeal] modifications" (*ATP* 86) on the level of the form of content through a kind of performativity of (gonzo) writing itself, which gives rise to the second elaboration of

forms of expression in Acosta's texts. That this type of writing (in the cases of both Acosta and Thompson) exists within both nonfiction and literature is the first signal of this strategy that

> zeroes in on the social periphery where the standards of culture and order have so unmistakably deteriorated that the normative narrative underwriting traditional journalism and its putative objectivity has become unsustainable. Thompson [and Acosta in his gonzo autobiographies] seeks out incongruities and creates a disruptive discourse as a form of literary/journalistic intervention. The text itself becomes an act of protest; the Gonzo narrator becomes a protestor-participant as he calls attention to the crisis of conventionality and the inability of the normative narrative to account for the continuous fissures in the social and economic domain. (Jirón-King 7)

At the same time, by being "the parody of the great individualist gone mad" – the protestor, participant, protagonist, and "the victim of the forces at play in the society at large" all rolled into one (Bruce-Novoa 43) – both Oscar and Raoul Duke *fail* to achieve what they so desperately seek: "the American Dream on [their] own ground[s]" (43). This failure, closely related to the ultimate failures of identity politics, its carnivalesque aesthetic mode, and of progressive politics post-1968, is underwritten by the "conceptual schizophrenia that undermines Gonzo [writing]" based not on the "academic limbo between 'journalism' & 'fiction,'" but the disjunction "between doing and writing" (43). The Gonzo dream of attaining the American Dream through a carnivalesque engagement with individualism and identity politics fails, writes Bruce-Novoa, "because the written word becomes static, at best only *representing* action; success would have required the achievement of another grand coalition, that of *writing and action, of the word and its object*. But ironically," he adds, "this is [also] the success of Gonzo; when the event reported fails, then the writing itself becomes the main event" (43, emphasis added).

Consider, here, the above-mentioned relationship between Oscar, Zeta, and Acosta, as these figures develop through the narratives of *The Autobiography* and *The Revolt*. We encounter Acosta – the flesh-and-blood historical personage born on April 8, 1935 in El Paso, Texas, USA – as the presupposition of *The Autobiography*. The defining features of autobiography as a genre, of course, endorse this presupposition. In the text itself, we encounter Oscar, the protagonist whom we quickly recognize as, at best, a fictionalized version of Acosta. The discrepancy of Acosta's age in 1967 (thirty-two), when the events of *The Autobiography* take place, and the protagonist's stated age as thirty-three (which, as noted above, contributes to Oscar's life's analogy with the life of Jesus Christ) is only the most trivial marker of this fictionalization. As Aldama notes, the narrator of *The Autobiography* emerges as distinct from Oscar by the end of the text, as the "character's [Oscar's] emergence into a fluid non-disjunctive subjectivity is to be identified with the narrator of the story *in toto*" (71). This narrator *in toto*, as I noted above, is Zeta, the protagonist of *The Revolt* who, by this logic, should be differentiated from the narrator of this text (*The Revolt*). How, then, can we theorize this second narrator? More importantly, is there a way for us to bring the *writing* of this narrator – his emergence at the level of expression – into contact with the *doing* of Acosta with whose presupposition we started reading?

Step 2: Shut Up

The emergence of Zeta, the narrator of *The Autobiography* and the protagonist of *The Revolt* marks the emergence of the second form of expression, and is associated with the successful transformation of Oscar, who resists pastoral power and learns to see value in being a degenerate object. There is, however, no such transformation at the end of or during *The Revolt*,

and this is so simply because *The Revolt* is not primarily concerned with identity politics. Indeed, while *The Autobiography* ends with Oscar's move (from, significantly, San Francisco) to Los Angeles and his transformation into "Zeta, the world-famous Chicano lawyer" (199), *The Revolt* ends with a marked dual failure. The first failure is that of Zeta's legal action. Whereas Zeta's overall strategy throughout the text is to reveal and transcend the limits of the actual legal order, the last chapter of the text sees Judge Alacran capture and obstruct his strategy by accusing Zeta of "confus[ing] politics with law quite a bit" (254) and by upholding the actuality of law, even projecting it into "anticipated future decisions by the Nixon court" (254). After this, Zeta and his "katzenjammer thugs" – "Gilbert, the fat frog, Pelon in his blue beanie, and little Sailor Boy with the shiv down his boot in case [they] got caught (254 – 255) – set off an explosive device inside the Hall of Justice which kills "one young man of presumably Latin descent" for which Zeta feels "terrible," but "not guilty" (256 – 257). The second failure is a retreat, within the text, from attempts at doing into writing, as "with a Chicano handshake" and a "Zeta, goodbye," (Zeta)[25] takes off, "headed [back!] for the bright lights and white women of San Francisco to write [his] swan song" (258). This (Zeta) who sets out to write his swan song among the white women of San Francisco is, ostensibly, the narrator of *The Revolt*. Yet as there is no transformation of identity throughout this text, (Zeta) is none other than Zeta himself. Paradoxically, this failure of personal transformation, in conjunction with the failure of his (virtual-actual) legal strategy and the recognition of the failure of discourse throughout the text[26], signals not a transformation of

[25] '(Zeta)' is, here, a kind of postulated narrator who, following the logic of *The Autobiography*, is the promised product of *The Revolt*'s narrative development. However, as we will soon see, this promise goes unfulfilled, as this promised product fails to manifest itself.

[26] The central chapters of *The Revolt* are filled with examples of 'stopped' discourse, where the presiding judge refuses Zeta's arguments and cuts them short ("No, we don't need any argument on this … Bailiff?" [142]), or

writing into doing (i.e. where writing itself would metamorphose into doing in some utopian way), but the 'success'/emergence of that which is immanent to the text, that which is performed-without-meaning.

To expand: the 'success' of *The Autobiography* – its praxis – rests on the development of the text's protagonist: his transformation from Oscar into Zeta via carnivalesque resistance to pastoral power and to his interpellation within the (actual) socio-legal apparatus. As such, this text's 'success' is transcendental to the narrative itself insofar as the narrator is transcendental to the narrative he or she relates: the key to gleaning this text's strategy lies in recognizing the way in which Oscar metamorphoses into Zeta. The carnivalesque mode of representation rests on this possibility of transformation, the possibility of the creation of the new, in the same way in which Zeta's legal strategy rests on drawing out the potentiality or virtuality of justice form the actuality of law. (This strategy is also the one explored in the first two chapters of this work via the triadic concept of Multiplicity.) This strategy – opening up the actuality of law to the virtuality of justice – ostensibly also dominates the narrative of *The Revolt*, but here it ultimately

---

where Zeta is given a polite hearing without allowing his words to produce any effect ("The order just said to give you a fair hearing, not a final ruling" [232]). More importantly, Acosta consistently draws the reader's attention to failure of words, of discourse, and of language:

> I lifted "Zeta" from a movie over two years ago because he was the closest thing to a Chicano Humphrey Bogart, the guy who always ended up with Maria Felix. The name I lived with for two years, the hidden name, an initial between two other words. And now there is no movie. Just me in the back seat with my rage and fear and two whiskey bottles full of vengeance because of another name, Robert Fernandez. Just a name, no body any more. My heart is pounding. (123)

Or:

> I tell him he is too sceptical.
>
> "What's that, *ese*?"
>
> I thought about it. "Shit if I know … it's one of those *gabacho* words that have no meaning." (107)

produces no change. It is ineffectual. It fails. At the same time, the narrative fails to produce a transcendental moment that would parallel Oscar's transformation into Zeta in the first novel. At the end of *The Revolt*, we are left with a tautology (Zeta) = Zeta or, more simply, Zeta = Zeta. So what is the significance of the narrative of *The Revolt*? Is it simply a narrative of the failure of doing? Is it, then, a performance of writing *as* doing?

We can answer this question by revisiting the central grotesque moment of *The Revolt*, in which the autopsy of Robert Fernandez is performed under Zeta's manic direction. Zeta presides over this autopsy, hoping that Robert's flesh will speak, that this expendable Cockroach's body's disarticulation will articulate what happened at the moment of his death, that it will provide his death with a meaning. However, he is disappointed: "I can't say for sure," Dr. Rubenstein tells Zeta after the autopsy, "I'm just not positive. If you ask me, I'll say that in my opinion, the physical evidence is inconclusive" (105). Robert's dead body is silent: it *refuses to signify*. Zeta subjects it to examination based on the expectations of the carnivalesque-grotesque mode of representation: that the body, ultimately, always signifies, that it is always caught in a web of meaning which is, at the very least, contestable and subject to interpretation. However, the "Coroner's Inquest" Zeta participates in subverts these expectations, as it is "an official proceeding where a group of eight men and women vote to direct the Coroner as to what is the cause of death. But it is not an adversary proceedings." Zeta "cannot participate as a lawyer. There is no cross-examination" (106). Robert's body has become "*just a name*, no body any more" (123, emphasis added).

In other words, the carnivalesque logic of *The Autobiography* no longer dominates Zeta's reality in *The Revolt*; at the very least, it fails this reality. And this is a direct outcome of Zeta's successful strategy of opening up the actuality of law to the virtuality of justice-law through a)

the gonzo narrative strategies of his two texts, and b) his *failed* struggles in the Superior Courts of Los Angeles. *The Revolt*'s failure, then, is a failure only from the perspective of the carnivalesque-grotesque mode of representation, which necessitates a transcendence of that upon which it exerts force. From the point of view of the contemporary grotesque, however, it is the very act of meaningless yet effective/affective presentation that becomes important. This, of course, does not completely negate the import of carnivalesque representation; rather, it sublates it. This means that this failure is not simply transformed into a success: the socio-political injustice of the treatment of Fernandez's body remains and ought to be addressed. The body ought to be *forced* to speak – this is a *political* imperative.

This act of sublation, however, draws out the asignifying body of the grotesque from the correlational realm of actual-virtual, doing so by establishing the grotesque body as a marker of "unilateral duality," through which the

> supplementary decision of specular reflexivity through which the philosopher is able to oversee the relation between X and Y is effectively reduced, rendered inoperative, so that the unilateral relation between X and Y has itself become unilateralized, deprived of its transcendent, bilateral circumscription via the subject of philosophy and leaving only the unilateralized difference between X and Y qua philosophy. (Brassier, "Axiomatic Heresy" 27)

This is an act of What Laruelle calls *cloning*, "an operation of radical immanence in so far as it takes on a transcendental relation to a given datum that has the form of the world, transforming that datum into a material by virtue of the very fact that it is *other than ... it*" (Laruelle 180). In other words, where the correlationist principle behind the carnivalesque treatment of the body sees in it matter as always signifying and hence as always caught up in a bidirectional

relationship with thought where the two are mutually defining, the act of cloning *axiomatically* postulates other-than-thought as revealed by materialist (yet correlational) philosophy (i.e. matter/body) as a material. Matter is here that with which we must start as before thought reached via thought.

To explain: in the triadic conceptualization of corporeal-ontological-Multiplicity we started with a dialogic relationship between the material and the ontological in which the material/matter always comes first but is *not*, therefore, primary or sovereign. Indeed, the material and the ontological were described as an example of content and expression, which are isomorphic with reciprocal presupposition (Deleuze and Guattari, *ATP* 44). In other words, it is only with the ontological that the material receives full consistency: functioning as an "act which retroactively opens up its own possibility" (Žižek, *The Parallax View* 203) – an act which Žižek calls "the moment of ontological openness" (203) – the ontological content that grotesque reveals can only be derived from the corporeal but is, at the same time, that which gives the corporeal its basic fabric or texture.

In the present case, grotesque (via cloning) starts with the philosophical data given in the above paragraph (which describes a correlational philosophical stance) in order to radicalize the primacy of grotesque body as matter and name/reveal this body as an index of ancestral reality, or reality independent of human consciousness. By doing so, the grotesque body becomes non-signifying, a kind of "non-rabbit" of which Brassier writes as "an entity without unity" (because it is only thought which imposes synthetic unity upon objects), and as "entirely immanent, entirely manifest [i.e. available to perception], in spite of the fact that it is neither a unitary nor an intentional phenomenon" ("Alien Theory" 166). While operating alongside the discourse of

philosophy[27], this conceptualisation of the grotesque body as "non-rabbit" – through what Brassier, following Laruelle, calls non-philosophy – is isomorphic to the negation of Punk explored in the previous chapter. In the present case, however, the negation is directed at Philosophy's anthropomorphic stance in order to advance a possibility of "radical translation, allowing creatures with otherwise utterly disparate sensory modalities and incommensurate individuation criteria to communicate via a cognitive vocabulary shorn of all contamination by empirically overdetermined conceptual schemes" (190). The grotesque body is here a negation (and sublation) of the correlational philosophical schema, and an index of the Real which must be made productive by drawing it into relationships with the Imaginary-Symbolic in the same way in which the negations of Punk were made productive by authors such as Ackroyd, Moore, and Sinclair. I will return to this problem in the following chapter.

Returning to Acosta's texts, what the above discussion means is that, unlike in *The Autobiography*, Zeta ("the philosopher") is, in *The Revolt*, unable to raise himself above the narrative in order to oversee the relation between the actuality of law (X) and the virtuality of justice (Y). His engagement with this correlational structure via the logic of the carnivalesque has, in important ways, transformed him into a body which in *The Revolt* becomes a marker of unilateral duality and is, hence, radically immanent to the narrative itself. Importantly, this immanence

> has not been posited and presupposed as given through a transcendent act of decision [i.e. through correlation between the actuality of law and virtuality of justice, or the actuality of narrative and virtuality of the narrator] but *axiomatically posited as already given,* independently of every perceptual or intentional presupposition, as well as every gesture

[27] Remember that, as noted above, Mullarkey writes of being "passive before the Real, letting it be, thinking alongside it" through "pure description" (145).

> of ontological or phenomenological position. It is posited as already given and *as already determining its own positing*. (Brassier, "Axiomatic Heresy" 28)

In other words, the grotesque body of *The Revolt* is *matter extricated from the logic of correlationism,* according to which "we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other," and which disqualifies "the claim that it is possible to consider the realm of subjectivity and objectivity independently of one another" (Meillassoux 5). This is evidenced by *The Revolt*'s body's inability to signify: as such, it has become torn out of the correlationist relationship between the virtual and the actual. This does not apply only to the dead body of Robert Fernandez, but also to the body of Zeta, the narrator and the protagonist of *The Revolt*. As extricated from the logic of correlationism, Fernandez's and Zeta's bodies are simultaneously extricated from the logic of signification and meaning and, as such, their names become "*non-conceptual symbol[s]* of the unobjectifiable immanence of the 'in-itself'" (Brassier, "Alien Theory" 104). This 'grotesque' body (grotesque only in the sense that it was successfully named through the operation of the grotesque as an aesthetic form) marked by the first names of Zeta and Fernandez, thus, "attains its rigorous *performative consistency*" as "the a-signifying immanence of material utterance becomes liberated from the Decisional [or correlational] hybridisation of signifying statement and a-signifying utterance" (104, emphasis added). In other words, while the narrative of *The Autobiography* is representative, the narrative of *The Revolt* is presentative or performative, both in relation to the grotesque body as matter in-itself and in relation to the legal struggles of Zeta. It is only after this radical immanence of matter-in-itself is posited that we are placed in a position to draw it back into the Symbolic-Imaginary realm, through which process we always ever access the realm of (socio-political) truths.

That these bodies as matter-in-itself are posited as already given is testified to by the body of the historical (Oscar Zeta) Acosta, born on April 8, 1935 in El Paso, Texas. Seen as a presupposition in relation to the carnivalesque mode of *The Autobiography*, Acosta is in the final determination shown to be matter that "determines thought without thought determining matter in return" (Brassier, "Alien Theory" 106). The narrative of the two autobiographical novels is, therefore, "the empirical material from which the unobjectifiable immanence of 'matter itself' … extract[s] a non-materiological thinking; one that is unilaterally determined by the immanence of material utterance. Instead of," therefore, "idealising matter according to the arbitrary strictures of thought, we … materialise thought in accordance with matter's necessary foreclosure to thought" (106). In other words, Acosta's real body has always, from the very beginning, unilaterally determined the "empirical idealisations" and "convenient speculative fictions" such as "'consciousness,' 'perception,' 'language,' [and] 'history'" (158) in conjunction with which the carnivalesque mode of the grotesque operates. While this materiality of the body does not necessarily imply a grotesque body, the grotesque aesthetic and its treatment of the human form are an important path to both revealing it, and to simultaneously preserving the progressive political potentiality of the carnivalesque within the Symbolic realm because of this aesthetic form's ability to, in the words of Daniel Smith, "convey[ ] the violence of … [a] sensation directly to the nervous system" (xiii).

The (grotesque) body – Zeta, Fernandez, Acosta – as matter-in-itself, therefore names "matter's *univocal ontological consistency*" that is always "multiply instantiable in a manifold of phenomenologically incommensurable registers of phenomenal descriptions" (Brassier, "Alien Theory" 161). While one of these registers is the world within which Acosta was born on April 8, 1935, another is the world of the narrative of Acosta's two autobiographical novels, whether

these are taken separately or in conjunction with one another. Nevertheless, it is important to note that these two registers do not exist on an equitable footing: for just as the carnivalesque as correlationist is shown to be "*relative* to the radical autonomy of a Real which is given-without-givenness and posited-without-position" (90), so is the world of the narrative shown to be relative to the material world of corporeal objects, most of which are subject to biological processes of degeneration. With this realisation we finally reach the ultimate cause of grotesque's ability to provoke *anxiety*, the affective knot that brings together the responses of horror/disgust and laughter. This cause is nothing else but the grotesque-image's fundamental nullification, or erasure, of the human horizon.

This conclusion marks not only the entry point into the space of the Real, it also marks *the anxiety of the specifically politically progressive imagination*, which is in the post-1968 world faced with the ubiquity of structure out of which it would, *utopically,* like to think/ extricate itself. Both deconstruction and the various conceptualisations of the passion for the Real are theoretical gestures meant to deal with this problem. In this light, Acosta's "head[ing] for the bright lights and white women of San Francisco to write [his] swan song" (258) at the end of *The Revolt*, as well as deconstruction and various versions of the passion for the Real, can be seen as embraces of different types of dead ends: forfeitures of the Symbolic and withdrawals into realms of textuality or imaginary transcendence. Nevertheless, they also mark – as precisely as this can be done – important theoretico-practical points of struggle within contemporary capitalist/democratic materialist culture. While the following chapter will not pretend to resolve the many contradictions which mark this struggle, I hope it will productively utilise the concept of the Real, plasticity (which sublates Derrida's *différance*), and a popular aesthetic form in order

to contribute to the furthering of progressive political imagination, its ties to practices of everyday life and, consequently, socio-political praxis.

The Promise (Reprise)

The grotesque body figures the non-rabbit. The non-rabbit is unfigurable. This means that the grotesque plays and refuses to play by the philosophical rules of individuation, via which we decide how it is that "something comes to be counted as 'one' [rabbit]" (Brassier, "Behold the Non-Rabbit" 50). Within the parameters of this Decisional philosophical problem[28], we start

[28] Brassier: the philosophical Decision "minimally consists in an act of scission or separation dividing two terms: a conditioned (but not necessarily perceptual or empirical) datum and its condition as an *a priori* (but not necessarily rational) faktum, both of which are *posited as given* in and through a synthetic unity wherein condition and conditioned, datum and faktum, are conjoined. Thus the philosopher posits a structure of articulation which immediately binds and distinguishes the conditioned datum – that which is given – whether it be perceptual, phenomenological, linguistic, social or historical, and its condition – its givenness – as an *a priori* faktum through which that datum is given: for example, sensibility, subjectivity, language, society, history.

What is crucial here is the way in which such a structure is immediately independent of, yet inseparable from, the two terms which it simultaneously connects and differentiates. It is a basically fractional structure comprising two differentiated terms and their difference as a third term that is simultaneously intrinsic and extrinsic, immanent and transcendent to those two terms. Thus, for any philosophical distinction or dyad, such as transcendental/empirical, subject/substance, being/beings, différance/presence, the distinction is simultaneously intrinsic and immanent to the distinguished terms *and* extrinsic and transcendent in so far as it is supposed to remain constitutive of the difference between the terms themselves. …

There is a sense in which the structure of decision is circular in that it already presupposes itself in whatever phenomenon or set of phenomena it articulates. Hence the suspicion that philosophy manages to interpret everything while explaining nothing, because the structure of the *explanans*, decision, is already presupposed in the *explanandum*, the phenomenon or phenomena to be explained. …

[This] guarantees that everything is potentially philosophizable, which is to say, possible grist for the decisional mill. … Philosophizing the world becomes a pretext for philosophy's own interminable self-interpretation. And since interpretation is a function of talent rather than rigour, the plurality of mutually incompatible yet unfalsifiable interpretations merely perpetuates the uncircumscribable ubiquity of

with the recognition that there is no such thing as "pre-theoretical immediacy through which 'consciousness' … enjoys privileged access to phenomena or 'things themselves' [or to 'rabithood']" (53). Rather, all knowledge and experience are caught up in a correlational loop between mind and matter, via which objects are always objects of experience and, as such, participate in the "traditional (but largely unstated) conceptual equivalence between 'being' and 'being-one,' or between entity and unity," which has historically within the (modern) Western context "figured as an uncircumventable precondition for ontology" (50). As Brassier points out, in this regard "Leibniz's famous claim according to which 'That which is not *one* being is not a *being'* encapsulates an entire ontological tradition" (50). The Kantian distinction between phenomena and noumena is one of the earliest examples of this correlational bend of modern philosophy in which unity (or synthesis) is given to the world of objects by the innate structures of the human mind; and the grotesque aesthetic form participates in this tradition as its deformed bodies are "always doubled by the body intact" (Remshardt 261). In its overcoming of bodies as organisms, as quantitative multiplicity, as one (explored in chapters one and two), the grotesque always invokes this entity as unity and as such relies on the philosophical link between these two concepts.

The body de-formed is therefore a constant, symbolising continuous variation. It is what we can, following Deleuze's study of Francis Bacon, call meat. It is, again, quantitative multiplicity or matter as corporeal, and qualitative multiplicity or "pre-individual and impersonal singularities" (Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* 297) emanating from the corporeal yet transcending it as forces of matter acting upon itself, as ontological. The body de-formed here operates according to the logic of Multiplicity explored in the previous chapters. This logic stitches the

---

philosophy's auto-encompassing specularity. Absolute specularity breeds infinite interpretation – such is the norm for the philosophical practice of thought" ("Axiomatic Heresy" 25 – 27).

corporeal to the ontological and it is univocal. As an unchanging exception to the rule, the body de-formed evokes the Law that is "essential to the determination of the virtualities through which the variation passes," the Law that is itself "optionally chosen" (Deleuze and Guattari, *ATP* 100). Of course, as Deleuze and Guattari also note, "constants are drawn from the variables themselves. … *Constant is not opposed to variable*; it is a treatment of the variable opposed to the other kind of treatment, or continuous variation" (103). This grotesque variation is, unlike the Deleuze-Guattarian, however, always stitched to structure: even if it is continuously deformed, the structure persists.

The body disarticulated is, hence, that which points back; it is that which makes looking back to the Symbolic rule (of ones) from the vantage point of grotesque de-formation, possible. As evoking the one-count of the body and as doubled by the body intact, the grotesque figures/ delineates and transforms the rule – the Law that sees *one* being as the only kind of *being* – out of which it materialises and which it transforms: "[I]t is like a flash of lightning in the night which, from the beginning of time, gives a dense and black intensity to the night it denies; which lights up the night from the inside, from top to bottom, and yet owes to the dark the stark clarity of its manifestation, its harrowing and poised singularity. The flash loses itself in this space it marks with its sovereignty and becomes silent now that it has given a name to obscurity" (Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression" 74). By picturing a de-forming rabbit or "undetached rabbit-part[s]" (Brassier, "Behold the Non-Rabbit" 62 – 3) in the process of metamorphosis, the grotesque also virtualises a rabbit as an organism, as a whole, as one. This structuration is here ontological, but it is also the principle according to which the realm of the actual or Symbolic tends to operate. The actuality of law is, in this sense, meant to be a consistent whole (even when, as in modern democratic capitalism, it relies on tension or conflict between its constituent

parts) that resists the disturbances of the virtual introduced to it from the outside. Within this context, the grotesque body is that which disturbs the 'normal' functioning of the consistent structural whole while also being parasitic upon it. This is evident, as explored above, in Acosta's elaboration of his own body as carnivalesque in *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*.

As further reading of Acosta's and Thompson's works showed us, however, the body distended is also diagrammatic. As such, it is not only Decisional and caught up in an organization of forms of contents and forms of expressions (Deleuze and Guattari, *ATP* 141 – 142, 144) – something we have explored above in relation to Acosta's use of the grotesque body in his two autobiographical novels. As diagrammatic, the grotesque body also "modulates [this] theory" (Mullarkey 174): "neither wholly iconic nor symbolic," it "instantiate[s] that which [it] supposedly look[s] like or symbolise[s]" (174). It is therefore (at least) dually functional or performative: in that it lays out the play between the virtual and the actual (as Decisional), and in that it instantiates a productive dead end for thought by naming matter-in-itself as Real. This productive dead end opens the space of the passion for the Real and is one of two productive dead ends of Western contemporary theory, the other being Derrida's notion of writing.

As such, the grotesque body is also an index of that which points 'out,' toward the radically immanent matter 'itself,' the thing-in-itself as distinguished from matter 'as such.' It is that which points toward what Brassier, following Laruelle, calls "non-Decisional theory for Decision" ("Alien Theory" 6) – the non-rabbit. The non-rabbit is here a conceptual index of a refusal to play the game of linking entity with unity. "The result," writes Brassier of Laruelle's work, is "a brilliantly disorienting exercise in anomalous conceptual subversion" ("Behold the Non-Rabbit" 51) via which "materiality-in-itself exceeds the ambit of intentional consciousness and the anthropocentric parameters of human being-in-the-world" (80). Like Punk, this use of

the grotesque body aims to "engender[ ] a definitive estrangement of the customary parameters of our phenomenological being-in-the-world" (71) by negating it (in the Hegelian sense). In other words, the grotesque body – the non-signifying disarticulated object known as Robert Fernandez – is here radicalized as matter-in-itself torn out of the correlationist context.

Fernandez's body is here "no longer a reifiable 'thing' at all" (74). It is not "defined privatively as a limiting concept, and is characterised instead as that whose immanent foreclosure to definition and constitution allows for its immanent effectuation by thought" which makes out of it "an unconditionally immanent phenomenon, or … *the transcendental phenomenon-in-itself = x*" (74). What this means is that the non-signifying body must here again be understood dually, as Janus-faced. On the one hand, it is the grotesque body that participates in the actual-virtual play within the realm of the Symbolic, trying to metamorphose the actuality of law as *one* (justice ought to prevail by opening up the law onto the realm of the virtual). On the other hand, as a body which does not signify, Robert Fernandez as *x* also becomes a "transcendental phenomenon-in-itself" in that: a) it is; b) it lacks ontological unity imposed upon objects by thought (is it Robert? is it just body parts? what does this *x* signify?); c) it must be presupposed by thought as that which is minimally necessary for thought, as a play of the actual and virtual, to emerge; and d) is consequently posited or performed as transcendentally necessary for the play of actual and virtual to occur[29] while being radically immanent to the aesthetic and philosophical

[29] As Brassier elaborates, "unlike Kant and Quine, Laruelle separates the gesture of presupposition from that of position at the same time as he separates immanence from its transcendental effectuation. First, immanence is presupposed (without-position) in its foreclosure to Decision as utterly empty and transparent, void of any and every form of predicative content, whether it be empirical or ideal. It is presupposed as the minimally necessary precondition for thought, as a negative or empty condition, rather than a positive, ontologically sufficient or substantive state of affairs. Which is to say that it is presupposed as foreclosed to the advent of ontological Decision concerning that which is or the way in which what is (i.e. foreclosed to the possibility of

situation out of which it emerges (this situation being this work's entire discussion of the grotesque up to this point).

Because it emerges out of a failure to signify (or as a negation of signification), this grotesque body establishes a "non-relational 'relation'" (Mullarkey 147) with its virtual/actual double. As such, this grotesque body lateralizes thought (the ontological) and matter (the corporeal), placing them "on a horizontal plane of equivalence – equivalence relative to the [grotesque body as] Real," and making of them equivalent empirical material. As Brassier writes, relative to this notion of the Real, "[e]verything is at once univocally concrete or equivalently phenomenal" and "indifferently abstract or utterly excarnate" so that "a bunny-rabbit has exactly the same phenomenal status as an axiom of set theory, and a particle accelerator has exactly the same phenomenal status as a toothache" ("Behold the Non-Rabbit" 73). Formally, then, thought and matter-iality here come together conceptually in their relation to the Real as indexed by the grotesque body.

The body of Robert Fernandez here becomes an autonomous Real that uses the grotesque treatment of the body as governed by the logic of Multiplicity as material. By radicalizing its notion of "having to start with the corporeal," this kind of Real becomes irreducible to that which it conditions: it just is, without content or attributes. Here, in the fullness of matter evoked by the grotesque, we recognize thought that becomes a thing – rather than having content, it is radically performative in that it is an immanent practice of philosophy and thought, inaccessible to thought yet conditioning it without being conditioned in return. This thought is the non-rabbit:

---

articulating the distinction between essence and existence). Second, and only by virtue of being presupposed as this necessary but non-sufficient condition, immanence is posited (without-presupposition) on the occasional basis of Decision, as transcendentally necessary for Decision. Only on the occasional basis of philosophical Decision can immanence be posited as transcendental and thereby become positively effectuated as a necessary condition for Decisional thought" ("Behold the Non-Rabbit" 69).

an entity without qualities evoked by the grotesque treatment of the body, refusing an anthropocentric imposition of unity.

Not only does, then, the grotesque body evoke the blind spot of Žižekian materialism, a blind spot that participates in the production of the materialist parallax gap discussed in the preceding chapter; it also evokes the "axiomatically determined … *hole in nothingness itself, not just in being,*" a "blind spot for philosophical auto-reflection" revealed by non-philosophy's "identity-in-person, the One in flesh and blood which does not tolerate either internal transcendence or external, operational transcendence" (Laruelle 174 – 75). This is a revelation of matter as ancestral, as "anterior to every form of human relation to the world" (Meillassoux 10).

In order to make this negative process productive within the sphere of the Symbolic – in order to make its No perform a Yes which "unleashes a dimension of positive characterisation already immanent in the terms and concepts to which it is applied" (Brassier, "Behold the Non-Rabbit" 80) – the next chapter will draw the concept of the grotesque as Real into a positive relation with the Lacanian triad from which it emerges: that of the Imaginary-Symbolic-Real.

CHAPTER FOUR

Plasticity and the Real Grotesques: Opening Necessarily Contingent Spacetimes

Plasticity of the Grotesque

With the previous chapter we have reached the ultimate cause of grotesque aesthetic mode's ability to provoke *anxiety*, the affective knot that brings together the responses of horror/disgust and laughter. This cause was shown to be the grotesque image's fundamental nullification, or erasure, of the human horizon. Yet this nullification – as revealed within the provenance of the philosophical and the aesthetic – is of particular concern for the *human animal as subject*. Catherine Malabou, a post-Derridean philosopher of form and structure, discusses the relation between anxiety and metaphysics in her book on Heidegger, in which she outlines an ontological argument that in many ways parallels the functioning of the grotesque as described in this work. As she notes, "structure [as form]" is "a possible master term for change [metamorphosis or de-formation]," and no structure "is thinkable apart from its modifiability, its articulation being the profound mark of its variability" (*The Heidegger Change* 266). Malabou terms this feature of structure *plasticity*, a concept she finds operative in Hegel (*The Future of Hegel*, published in 1996) and Heidegger (*The Heidegger Change*, published in 2004), as well as in the study of the brain and the intersection of this study with psychoanalysis[1]. She shows that this concept allows us to think with and beyond deconstructive *différance*, as it "challenge[s] us

[1] This, of course, is the epitome of the study/discourse of the human animal as subject and Malabou discusses it in *What Should We Do With Our Brain* (2004), *The New Wounded: From Neurosis to Brain Damage* (2004), and *Self and Emotional Life: Merging Philosophy, Psychoanalysis, and Neuroscience*, co-authored with Adrian Johnston (2013).

to think a new, non-graphic meaning, as a result of *différance* itself" (*Changing Difference* 63), a meaning which extends from the discursive realm into the realm of the material.

"Plasticity," Malabou writes, "refers to a dual ability [of physical and/or conceptual structures] to receive form … and give form[2]" (63). As such, *différance* itself becomes only a step in the continual metamorphosis of (thinking about) form, which allows us to subsequently see that "there is … a power to shape meaning that exceeds graphic displacement [operative in Derrida's concepts such as trace, supplement, and *différance*]. … There is something other than writing in writing" that is neither speaking nor presence, and that "does not introduce any logocentrism" (64). Without plasticity, *différance* would not be possible, she argues, and without *différance* the discovery of plasticity would have remained obscured: "No paradigm of transformation has the value of a transcendental instance. By definition a supplement has no element, no origin, no essence, which is precisely why its destiny is that of constant change" (64). Even change changes, and *différance* is only a step in this process.

The grotesque can be seen as an instance of plasticity, operating upon representations of the empirical reality of the human body/form as given. Like plasticity, grotesque bodily de-formations reveal and educe the structure(s) upon which they operate, while emphasising the function and place of the body and the somatic within the context of current debates about languages and discourses. (This latter feature, the focus on the somatic, emerges in Malabou's above-mentioned analyses of the brain and neurobiology's intersections with psychoanalysis.) The grotesque, then, like plasticity, tries to think beyond the writing of writing into "*the systemic law of the deconstructed real*" (Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing* 57) which is multi-

[2] In her work on Hegel and Heidegger and more explicitly in her later work, particularly *The New Wounded*, she also discusses the destruction of structure/form via examples such as Alzheimer's disease. I am here, however, more interested in the dual process of giving and receiving (or metamorphosis) of form.

modal (physical, discursive, economic, political) and premised on "the continuous implosion of form, through which it recasts and reforms itself continually" (57).

Samuel Delany's science fiction/fantasy, autobiographical, and pornographic writings, some of which I will be using to discuss the grotesque in this chapter, are paradigmatic examples of (grotesque) plasticity in fiction. In their thinking about structure as plastic, many of his novels – principally the Return to Nevèrÿon[3] fantasy series (1979 – 1987) written in the tradition of Robert E. Howard's Conan novels and the grotesquely pornographic *The Mad Man* (1994) – engage directly with the work of, among others, Derrida (and Lacan). The Return to Nevèrÿon, for example, does this by organizing its eleven tales (some of which are novella- and some novel-length) into a mutually critiquing series of discursive and symbolic narrative encounters. Several critics have noted that the series' narrative technique is hence "explicitly derive[d] from Derrida" as it rests on deconstruction and re-evaluation of a series of binary oppositions (Spencer 74) and on "the concept and praxis of displacement or decentering" (Kelso 291), so that "the most significant political acts [in these texts] are likely to occur not on the material level of political economy, but on the level of sign and symbol" (Call 290)[4]. However, Delany himself points out how these encounters go beyond the work of textual *différance* into the realm of what we are here calling plasticity. This is, first of all, evident on the level of semiotics, where the Derridean notion of writing encounters "the classical notion of the sign (stoically divided into a signifier and signified)," Umberto Eco's "account of semiosis that allows sign systems to evolve,

[3] *Tales on Nevèrÿon* (1979), *Neveryóna, or: The Tale of Signs and Cities* (1983), *Flight from Nevèrÿon* (1985), and *Return to Nevèrÿon* (1987).

[4] Similar claims regarding Delany's engagement with Derrida in the Nevèrÿon series are made by Georgia Johnston in her "From the Margins of Derrida: Samuel Delany's Sex and Race," Wendy Galgan in her *Return to Nevèrÿon*: A 'Derridian-esque' Meditation," and by others.

generate new signs, critique themselves, and *generally to change*" (Delany, "Appendix" 270, emphasis added), and Roland Barthes' semiology: "the excess, the leftover, the supplement of linguistics" (271) defined as "the labor that collects the impurities of language, the waste of linguistics, the immediate corruption of any message: nothing less than desires, fears, expressions, intimidations, advancements, blandishments, protests, excuses, aggression, and melodies of which active language is made" (Barthes, qtd. in "Appendix" 271). Here, we can see, language spills over into the (manifold) other(s) of language.

This is why the role of language is in Delany bracketed as "first and foremost a *stabilizer* of behavior, thought, and feeling, of human responses and reactions – both for groups and for individuals" (274). This bracketing reveals that which is other than writing in and through writing. While "it is precisely by its ability to stabilize reactions at the level of the signified that language creates – or 'introduces the subject into' – the Symbolic" (274), language is not thus causative: it "is not the problem," as Delany writes, "only a tool to help with solutions" (276). Language can thus help us to "find destabilizing systems, counter-stabilizing systems, and reactions and responses simply too great to be stabilized by the systems [or structures] available (reactions both social and psychological), many if not most of them nonlinguistic" (277). "There is 'an eye at the edge of discourse,'" writes Malabou, echoing Delany's thoughts:

> This eye is the optical arrangement that language, in its structure, shows on its edge, so that to speak is to give birth to the visibility of that about which I am speaking. The eye that borders discourse certainly sees other things than discourse, but this "other thing" can only be envisaged through a discourse function. A look is inscribed originarily in the speech that destines saying and seeing to each other. Thus, as Lyotard explains:

> "language is not a homogenous milieu; it is divisive because it exteriorizes the sensible opposite itself." (*Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing* 56)

Plasticity thus changes the changes, displacements, and decenterings inherent in *différance* as writing and discourse, revealing – as this chapter will explore through, among other things, an analysis of Delany's writings – the systemic law of the deconstructed Real premised on the primary philosophical category of *metamorphosis* of structure (structure and form being inherent components of this process).

On the ontological level, Malabou notes, Heidegger's notion of essence reveals precisely this metamorphic-structural dynamic: the term essence has "only ever designated, under the skin of metaphysics and despite ontological dogma, the transformability of beings, never their substantial stability" (*Changing Difference* 136). In this context, anxiety is an affective registering of the fact that what is revealed to Dasein[5] (a concept that I will here treat as synonymous with 'the human animal as subject') is "the essential, which is, namely, that *the essential is changing*" (*The Heidegger Change* 252). Even the primary Western philosophical impulse – to stabilize and make present essence as unchanging – is hence the result of the more originary nature of the philosophical as such which produced this impulse and which is revealed as affective through anxiety: "We could even go as far as to say," argues Malabou, "that *the origin of philosophy is the affective rapture of change granted by the essentially changing character of affective rapture*. *The root of philosophy is, then, 'the affect (of the) metamorphic' as such*" (253).

---

[5] Dasein and other Heideggerian notions are here filtered strictly through the work of Malabou and her discussion of 'Heideggerian plasticity,' which she synthesizes from Heidegger's use of terms *Wandel, Wandlung, and Verwandlung* – or change, transformation, and metamorphosis. These terms, as Malabou notes, remain unsystematized in Heidegger's philosophy, so that they have been "left waiting … [for their] *exegetical switching-on*" through which Heidegger himself is changed (2).

Anxiety – an affect that results from the fact that, aesthetically, the grotesque object displays an attack upon the coherent human form and that it "always displays *a combination of fearsome and ludicrous qualities* – or, to be more precise, it simultaneously arouses reactions of fear [and disgust] and amusement in the observer" (Jennings 10) – is here ontologized as announcing "the metamorphosis of the human into Dasein" (Heidegger, qtd. in *The Heidegger Change* 254). This metamorphosis is characterized by: a) a *change* in human subjectivity – a kind of birth of (philosophical) self-consciousness – which is a result of a "receding of beings as a whole" (254) during which, as Simon Critchley notes, "one is suddenly seized by the feeling of meaninglessness, by the radical distinction between yourself and the world in which you find yourself. With this experience of anxiety … Dasein is individualised and becomes self-aware." Dasein here marks the revealing of being (which is filled with meaning) as distinguished from beings (which are meaningless). At the same time, nevertheless, this change becomes: b) a prefiguration of a possible *exchange* between (ontological) being and (phenomenological) beings. Anxiety here "makes manifest the nothing" which "is encountered at one … with beings as a whole" and which reveals "beings in their full strangeness" (Heidegger, qtd. in *The Heidegger Change* 254 – 255). In other words, while being as a philosophical category carries potential meaning, beings are revealed as opaque, meaningless – as non-thing(s). Yet at the same time, as one of those beings – as "strange(r)" itself – Dasein starts to understand that "beings can be of value for being and that this is precisely what happened in and as traditional metaphysics" (255). The "abyss between being and beings that anxiety … opens before [Dasein]" (255 – 256) is, in other words, simultaneously crossed by a realization that *being itself is non-thing*, or, that essence (as another name for the metaphysical concept of being) is only ever change or plasticity. It is important to note that being and beings are non-things in the sense

in which, as Žižek points out, zombies, as undead, are non-dead as opposed to not dead: rather than representing a state opposed to life, they signify death as "absolutely immanent, located at the very core of" life itself (*Less than Nothing* 166). The prefix non- thus opens up "a third domain which undermines the underlying distinction" between a thing and its simple negation (166) so that what is first seen as an opposition (being vs. beings) reveals a dialectically constitutive relation: plasticity as the single voice with which being and beings are spoken, their univocity.

Being and beings therefore communicate in the realm of non-thingness, where "ontology is … the name of an originary migratory and metamorphic tendency" (*The Heidegger Change* 270) and where Dasein discovers its own strangeness, its own alterity: where "I am what I am – *changed in advance*" (270). The contemporary grotesque signifies this, as we saw, via the erasure of the human horizon articulated through a violent disarticulation of the human form. The grotesque thus reveals that the horizon of non-thingness of being(s) is marked precisely by, in Malabou-Heideggerian parlance, the metamorphosis of Dasein's form. Figuring the potential sites of ex/change between being and beings, this process also allows us to enter an ontological plateau on which we can avoid the traps of what Quentin Meillassoux has called *correlationism*.

As we saw in the previous chapter, as a philosophical schema, correlationism implies that "we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other," disqualifying "the claim that it is possible to consider the realm of subjectivity and objectivity independently of one another" (Meillassoux 5). Correlationism thus theorises the ex/change between being and beings by relegating beings to a subordinate role in the service of an anthropocentric conceptualisation of reality. In the present context, as recognising Dasein's withdrawal from beings, correlationism can therefore be seen as

analogous to deconstruction: a step in the revealing of metamorphosis/plasticity as philosophy's primary tendency. Correlationism also marks a moment at which Dasein forgets that beings' physical non-thingness is also its own: a moment of forgetfulness of material, corporeal, or physical plasticity of things that is also us/ours.

Change and difference are at the heart of correlationism's philosophical schemas. This is evident even in Derrida who is not, strictly speaking, a correlationist[6] but whose work is "at least negatively correlationist when it claims that there is no outside-the-text" (Shaviro, *The Universe of Things* 7) or when it refuses "to think Outside of philosophy" or "how philosophy is itself determined by something that escapes it" (Žižek, *Less than Nothing* 329). It is also to be found in Deleuze who, most notably in his books on cinema and in *A Thousand Plateaus* with Félix Guattari, elaborates an "approach to non-correlational thought" (Shaviro, *The Universe* 130) while also, as Brassier argues, conceptualising being throughout his work in correlationist terms as always "occur[ing] in and as thought" (*Nihil Unbound* 203). An engagement with correlationism is thus, in many ways, a hallmark of what we see as postmodern. Yet, while often developing its theoretical systems around change and difference, correlationism's "claim that there is a necessary reciprocity between mind and nature" also evidences "a yearning to obliterate the distinction between knowledge and value" and a desire to "revoke spirit's estrangement from matter, to reforge the broken 'chain of being,' and ultimately to repudiate the labour of disenchantment initiated by Galileo in the physical realm, continued by Darwin in the biological sphere, and currently being extended by cognitive science to the domain of mind [or brain]" (Brassier, *Nihil Unbound* 40). By affectively opening up the ontological plateau via the

[6] As Ian Balfour pointed out in a personal communication, Derrida's work is "mainly about the violence of language in relation to what is not technically language (even if totally under the sway of *différance*) so it doesn't presuppose any 'fit' or system of mutual presuppositions of subject and object."

images of a tarnished human form, the grotesque is the aesthetic form best suited to – à la plasticity and contra-correlationism – furthering the mind-as-brain image and thereby the labour of disenchantment highlighted by Brassier. In this way, the grotesque also sublates the notions of change, displacement, and difference via concepts of metamorphosis and plasticity, while opening up the possibility of talking about that which is other than writing in writing, other than discourse in discourse via the notion of the Real, thereby opening the window of being onto the landscape of beings.

The grotesque does this by figuring the unfigurable; by figuring what Brassier calls the *non-rabbit*: an "entity-without-unity" that is "entirely immanent, precisely articulated within the bounds of conceptual thought," remaining "*available to perception … with the crucial proviso that the empirical parameters of human sensory apparatus become theoretically reconfigured* in accordance with certain transcendental strictures" (Brassier, "Alien Theory" 166, emphasis added). This non-rabbit can, in light of the discussion above, be theorized as the Malabou-Heideggerian process of ex/change between being and beings, where the transcendental strictures of seeing rest on the primacy of metamorphosis or plasticity as a conceptual category. Dasein's ability to see plasticity first thus allows it to see a rabbit (an exemplary being) as non-thing, a non-rabbit, in the same sense in which it sees itself and being as non-things, as changed in advance.

In Lacanian/Žižekian terms, this figuring that reorganizes empirical parameters of the human sensory apparatus – that reconfigures ways of seeing – is also the unveiling of the realm of the Real in its three modalities. As Žižek notes, the three terms of the Lacanian Imaginary-Symbolic-Real triad are "inherently interwoven" so that

> the entire triad reflects itself within each of its three elements. There are [thus] three modalities of the Real: the "real Real," … the "symbolic Real," … and the "imaginary Real." The Real is thus effectively all three dimensions at the same time: the abyssal vortex that ruins every consistent structure, the mathematized consistent structure of reality, [and] the fragile pure appearance. (*Organs without Bodies* 102 – 103)

The notion of plasticity, as we will see, permeates all three of these modalities. The grotesque form effectuates – brings forth – and functions within them. As such, grotesque forms are themselves pictorial instantiations of: a) the fragile pure appearance (evidenced by its evocation of anxiety in the modality of the imaginary Real), b) the mathematized consistent structure of reality (as will be explained in relation to its functioning as the symbolic Real), and c) the abyssal vortex (seen in their occasioning the modality of necessary contingency, which will be discussed in relation to the grotesque's functioning as the real Real).

In a filmed lecture entitled *The Reality of the Virtual*, Žižek describes these modalities of the Real as follows: a) the imaginary Real is embodied by "an image which is too strong to be confronted." The examples of this modality are "monsters" and "what in science fiction or horror is called the 'Thing.'" In *Organs without Bodies*, he describes this modality of the Real as "the horrifying Thing, the primordial object, from Irma's throat to the Alien" (102); b) the symbolic Real is exemplified by quantum physics which is made up of "formulas which work – [that are] experimentally confirmed," but that "we cannot translate … into our daily experience of ordinary reality." The symbolic Real is here a system of "pure signifiers," "a functioning machine" that is also "meaningless: we cannot make any sense out of it, we cannot relate it to our experience, which is why we try so desperately … to invent metaphors to imagine" it. Or, in

Organs without Bodies: the symbolic Real is the carrier of "consistency: the signifier reduced to a senseless formula" (102 – 103); and finally, c) the real Real is "the very core of the Real."

This elusive modality of the Real is, of course, difficult to describe. Žižek conceptualizes it as bifurcated into two metaphorical levels. On the one hand, the real Real is "relatively close to the Symbolic" and is represented by "all that accompanies the Symbolic level as its obscene shadow." It is the "shadowy virtual reality of affects, which has to accompany the official discourse." In Astra Taylor's *The Examined Life*, Žižek argues that this level can be seen in man-produced mountains of trash that are the obscene shadow – the truth – of the capitalist mode of production[7]. On the other hand, the real Real is deeply related to the notion of virtuality. This kind of Real can be described, in Rumsfeldian language[8], as a system of "unknown knowns" – "things we don't know we know. … [T]hey are a part of our identity, they determine our activity, but we don't know that we know them. This is what in psychoanalysis, of course, is called *unconscious*[9] – unconscious fantasies, unconscious prejudices, and so on. And I think this level is crucial." Žižek adds: this Real "doesn't exist in itself; it's just an abstract form which

---

[7] I am using 'mode of production' here in the Althusserian sense. Frederic Jameson describes Althusser's use of 'mode of production' by pointing out that rather than conceiving this term as operating in the strictly Marxian sense – on the level of the economic base or infrastructure, i.e. as composed of relations of production and forces of production – Althusser adopts a structuralist approach for which "only *one* structure exists: namely the mode of production itself, or the synchronic system of social relations as a whole. This is the sense in which this 'structure' is an absent cause [i.e. it is virtual], since it is nowhere empirically present as an element, it is not a part of the whole or one of the levels, but rather the entire system of *relationships* among those levels" (*The Political Unconscious* 36).

[8] Žižek here refers to Donald Rumsfled's – the Secretary of Defense under Presidents Gerald Ford (1975 – 1977) and George W. Bush (2001 – 2006) – 2002 analysis of evidence alleging that the government of Iraq was in possession of WMDs (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/There_are_known_knowns).

[9] In Marxist thought, this is, of course, called *ideology*.

structures the disposition of actually existing elements around it [i.e. it is virtual, in the same sense in which the Althusserian concept of mode of production is virtual]." In *Organs without Bodies*, Žižek describes this idea in slightly more abstract terms: the real Real is the "mysterious *je ne sais quoi*, the unfathomable 'something' on account of which the sublime dimension shines through an ordinary object" (103).

By working through the logic of the modalities of the Real via the grotesque aesthetic form (in Delany) and Malabou's notion of plasticity, this chapter will argue that the nullification of the human horizon accomplished by the grotesque produces a knowledge of *the ancestral reality* (Meillassoux), a reality that is closely aligned with but not identical to the reality of the Real and which can be described as "any reality anterior to the emergence of the human species – or even anterior to every recognized form of life on earth" (10). This reality, as we will see, is intimately related to plasticity of being(s). There are two interconnected consequences of the emergence of this reality: a) manifestation, or thought/consciousness's apprehension, of the conceptual and physical worlds is shown to "emerge in time and space" and is, consequently, "not the *givenness of a world*, but rather an intra-worldly occurrence" (Meillassoux 14); and b) "thought is [shown to be] in a position *to think manifestation's emergence in being*, as well as a being or a time anterior to manifestation (14). The grotesque actuates this knowledge in three synchronous steps: a) on the level of the imaginary Real, it assaults the human body, producing images too strong to be confronted; b) on the level of the symbolic Real, it utilises this grotesque image to depict a merging of two different kinds of spacetime: the absolute, external spacetime of ancestral reality and the relative, internal spacetime of human consciousness; and c) by doing this it presents a number of unknown knowns which do not exist in themselves but are, instead, abstract forms which structure the disposition of actually existing elements around them. These

unknown knowns are: i) *matter as arche-fossil or fossil-matter*, defined as "materials indicating the existence of an ancestral reality" (Meillassoux 10); ii) *phenomenally represented information* as that upon which language and thought are supervenient as "only phenomenally represented information can become the object of linguistic or cognitive reference" (Metzinger, *Being No One* 573); and iii) the grotesque form's status as *necessarily contingent* (see Meillassoux 62 – 67), which allows us to see that its – our – world "must conform to *certain determinate conditions*, which can then be construed as *so many absolute properties of what is*" (Meillassoux 66).

The Imaginary Real Grotesques

On a very basic level, this entire work is premised on analyses of the grotesque as an instantiation of the imaginary Real. The deformed bodies visualized by R. Crumb and Francis Bacon; Sarah Kane's images of body parts lopped off and carried away by rats; Tarantino's violent treatments of Nazi-bodies; Sinclair's, Ackroyd's, and Moore's tales and images of violence enacted upon the bodies of women and the working-class poor; and Acosta's and Thompson's psychedelic visions and reworkings of types of carnivalesque forms – all these are instantiations of the horrifying Thing that is, as Žižek argues, too strong to be confronted.

As used here, the meaning of the phrase "too strong to be confronted" can be clarified via a discussion from a 2011 episode of Discovery Channel's *Curiosity,* entitled "How Evil Are You?" In it, Eli Roth, a horror film director whose movies are known for ultraviolent and gory imagery, subjected himself to a series of fMRI brain scans while he was being shown disturbing and violent images. James Fallon, a neuroscientist and a professor in the School of Medicine at the University of California, Irvine, then discussed the results of these scans, noting two

concurrent responses in Roth's brain. On the one hand, the fMRI images showed areas of activation in Roth's brainstem, which Fallon interpreted to be responses indicative of nausea[10]. On the other hand, Fallon noted that the fMRI scans also suggested a shutting down of the empathy centres of Roth's brain while he was being shown these images. Interestingly, then, these fMRI images seem to show Roth's brain's response (to what we can classify as the imaginary Real) as being a combination of disgust with an active effort to represent these images *as images* – as ontologically separate from the actuality of one's daily existence.

But, as Fallon points out, this response is somewhat atypical. By shutting down its empathy centres in these circumstances, Roth's brain was exhibiting a state commonly found in individuals diagnosed with psychopathy. From this, we can extrapolate that a more common response to what we are here calling the imaginary Real, composed of a sense of nausea in combination with an elicitation of empathy, would be exactly the kind of response that Kant highlights in his discussion of aesthetics, when considering the representation of ugliness in art. After noting that "beautiful art displays its excellence precisely by describing beautifully things that in nature would be ugly or displeasing," Kant adds: "[O]nly one kind of ugliness cannot be represented in a way adequate to nature without destroying all aesthetic satisfaction, hence beauty in art, namely, that which arouses loathing [or, in the translation of Alastair McEwen, disgust]" (*Critique of the Power of Judgment* 190). The grotesque as imaginary Real considered here can be seen as a variation of the kind of ugliness that arouses loathing or disgust. And, as Kant concludes, "since in this strange sensation, resting on sheer *imagination*, the object is represented as if it were imposing the *enjoyment* which we are nevertheless *forcibly resisting* [in McEwen's translation: we "reject it violently"], *the artistic representation of the object is no*

[10] Roth here shares a story of regularly being nauseous – and once "projectile vomiting" – while watching horror movies as a child.

longer distinguished in our sensation from the nature of the object itself, and it then becomes impossible for the former to be taken as beautiful" (190, emphasis added).

In other words, the moments at which the grotesque provokes disgust (or, more precisely, in its combination with laughter, anxiety) are those moments when its status as imaginary Real is operative. What Žižek describes as an image too strong to be confronted, as monstrous and what in horror and science fiction is called the Thing, is here precisely that which, as Kant notes, makes it difficult to distinguish in our apprehension an object's artistic representation from the nature of this object in empirical reality. The grotesque as imaginary Real thus functions by short-circuiting the mimetic/artistic distance between the thing and its representation. As Winfried Menninghaus writes in his study of disgust via the lens of an aesthetic tradition he traces through thinkers such as Kant, Nietzsche, Freud, Kafka, Bataille, Sartre, and Kristeva:

> Precisely as that which transgresses civilized prohibitions, incites the (anal-sadistic) destruction of beautiful form, and laughingly transcends the symbolic order – precisely as this scandal, the disgusting [which, as Menninghaus also notes citing Aurel Kolnai's 1929 study of disgust, "always points 'in some way to anxiety'" (16)] advances into the abandoned position of the inaccessible "real" and of quasi-metaphysical truth. (11)

This tradition finds its impetus in Kant for whom, as Derrida argues in his "Economimesis," the disgusting troubles the aesthetic, marking the space of that which cannot be articulated within his system. The literally disgusting – shit, piss, vomit, menstrual blood – is therefore for Kant a placeholder, "maintained, as security, in place of the worse" ("Economimesis" 23). What matters is not just vomit but, more importantly, "vicariousness of vomit," the *x* underneath it that is an "unrepresentable, unnameable, unintelligible, insensible, unassimilable, obscene other which forces enjoyment and whose irrepressible violence would undo the hierarchizing authority

of logocentric analogy – its power of identification" (25). This vicariousness of vomit – the obscene, unnameable *x* – is in the context of this discussion vomit as non-thing, the power of metamorphosis that troubles order/presence from within and is imaged as vomit. It is the non-thingness of dirt, cum, piss, and shit that John Marr, the protagonist of Delany's *The Mad Man*, locates as a source of pornotopic enjoyment, of *jouissance*[11].

While the beautiful and the sublime necessitate a feeling of distance and recognition of art as mimetic for their effects to take place, the thing represented as grotesque becomes – possibly because of the strong feeling of disgust/anxiety it arouses – more real, more actual. And even though this is ultimately only a kind of trick of art, the subject's reaction must be seen as emotionally genuine (as we will see below, this trick of art and our reaction to it also say something about structures of the human animal as subject and of reality). This dynamic helps us to understand the connection between the grotesque and anxiety, as composed of a mixture of incongruous affective responses (horror/disgust and laughter). The ontological, as explored through Dasein and plasticity, is here brought into proximity with neurological-subjective responses of the human animal when confronted with the aesthetics of the grotesque: anxiety as affective registering of change or plasticity (as ontological) thus forms a knot with anxiety as affective registering of an object of disgust and laughter (as empirical and aesthetic).

---

[11] I will return to this, shortly, below. Allow me here to add that Derrida argues that Kant protects his systematization of the aesthetic and, ultimately, Reason by conceptualizing the disgusting as this system's representable (in its unaesthetic-ness) other. In Kant, then, the disgusting is the system's admitted limit. What this admitted limit hides, however, is the way in which this exclusion is "the very form of what the exclusion [of dis-gust] serves to construct" (23). In other words, what's "the worse" than the disgusting is that which is "more disgusting than the disgusting" – i.e. the inability of the system to conceptualize a thing: *the Thing*. This is the Real, the Thing that the grotesque here represents, paradoxically, as *non-thing*. The grotesque is therefore, again Janus-faced: Kant's disgusting/unaesthetic *and* Derrida's "the worse," here theorized as plasticity.

Samuel Delany's *The Mad Man* – a novel concerned primarily with how structure and form emerge out of a kind of contemporary Dionysian chaos and described in its "Disclaimer" as "a pornotopic fantasy" – opens with a grotesque "Proem" that, especially within the present Symbolic order, relies for its effects upon the dynamic described above. "Black, raddled, roped with veins," the proem opens,

> it rose, a charred tallboy from snarled bronze. Below, the texture and color of overripe avocados, testicles hung like rocks. It sagged in the envelope of flesh that held it to the belly, almost as high as the navel's gnarled pit. A black cock on a hulking white man? A dog's dick on a humongous buck? Only, beyond seven feet, it wasn't a man, though yellow hair tufted the crevice beneath its thick and blocky arm. (1)

Anatomizing the body through the narrative/reader's eye, the proem resumes: "The head turned polished copper horns above the barrel chest, penny colored nipples – silver dollar sized – ghosted in wiry brass. The tongue slathered up to lave bright mucus from the taurine pad enveloping the nostrils, muzzle tusked nearer boar than bull" (1). A giant cock on a grotesque, animal body; and then, significantly, "One callused and engrimed foot was, anyway, human."

The other foot, "claw[ed]" and "scaled in olive" completed "a leg, feathered, ashen, ebon, and misshapen as a condor's. "Neither bird's nor bat's, but stretched on spines like an insect's or a fish's … its wings" were "fifteen feet high" (1 – 2). "Hanging from the small of its back, covering the crevice between beast-broad buttocks," the creature's tail

> jerked aside, to let honking gases, then to drop its crumbling turd, black, grass- and bone-rich, steaming on the frost – while, before its belly, urine arched, sudden, heavy, gold, to spill and splat, angrily on the macadam. Unconcerned with where it slopped or flopped, first it reached back to maul its still-delivering sphincter, then to raise the thick man hand,

> swung inadvertently through its stream, to its mouth, to enjoy its salts, the stench on its fingers, gnaw at the wrecked nails with taurine teeth, blinking goat-slit eyes (black crevices rising across corner-clotted crimson), while its water crawled under the iron rail at the path's edge, overflowed the cement, and dripped, boiling, bubbling, into the Hudson's glass-green rush. (2)

This monstrous hybrid body reaches back into the history of the grotesque, drawing upon its combination of plant, animal, and human parts that Vitruvius described and condemned as early as the first century BCE. Added to this are the body's overt sexualisation, a focus on its openings, combined with a sexualised urophagia and coprophagia, which contemporize the grotesque by locating it in the tradition of Bakhtin's analysis of the concept, as well as by seeing it as adjacent to Julia Kristeva's conceptualization of abjection.

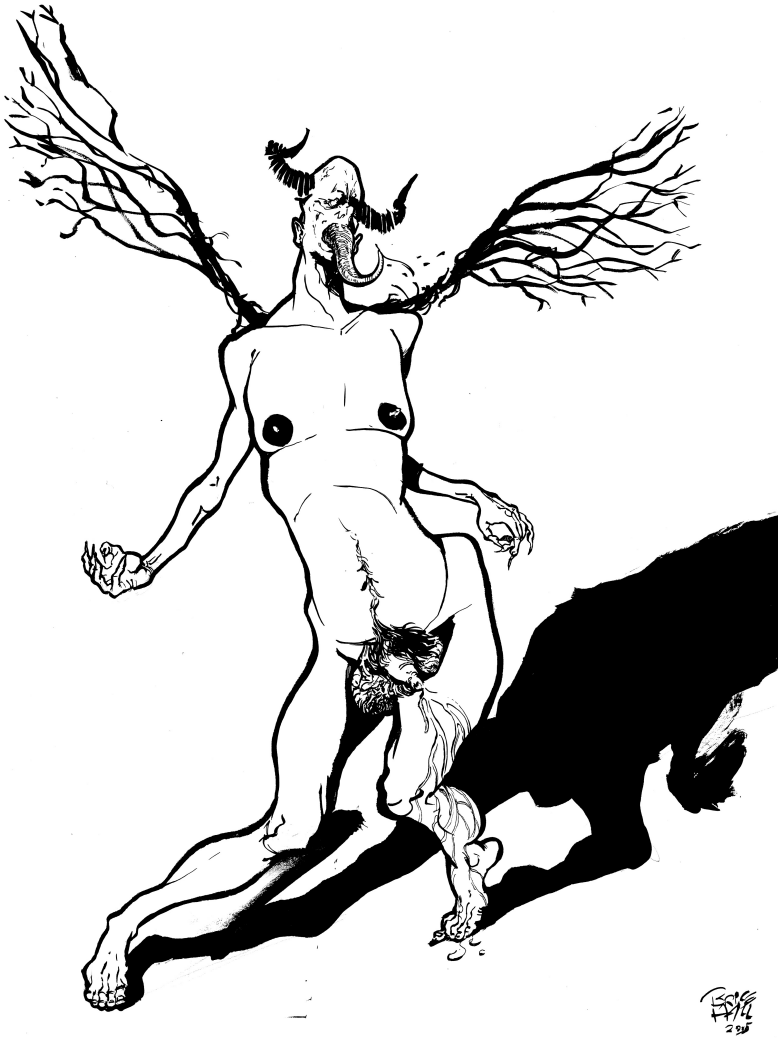


Figure 3: An original drawing of Delany's creature, by Brice Hall

This image will continue to reverberate through the "copious, epic descriptions of cocksucking, piss-drinking (and occasionally shit-eating) together with oceanic

spurts of semen (as well as piss) erupting from truly gigantic cocks" (Shaviro, "The Mad Man") that form the core of the novel's pornotopic fantasy. Delany is careful to highlight the fantastic[12] aspects of these events, noting that the "incidents, places, and relations among" the novel's characters "have never happened and could never happen for any number of self-evident reasons" (*The Mad Man* ix). Nevertheless, it is important to note that the text's utopian and apocalyptic proclivities, which, according to Guy Davidson, "provide a powerfully dialectical account of the intertwined operations of commodity culture and eroticism within the postmodern metropolitan context" (13 – 14), is rooted in a realist and naturalistic narrative strategy. Delany himself notes that in *The Mad Man*, he tried to "negotiate pornotopia more realistically than most," which is why some readers confuse the text with straightforward realism. The novel's "venue is pornotopia," notes Delany, "for all I have used [a realistic portrayal of life on New York's Upper West Side] as the basis for what I wrote" ("Thomas L. Long Interview" 133).

This dual dynamic is already evident in the proem's description of the monstrous body whose naturalistically (if lyrically) described parts, traces of human form, and location in New York all point beyond the simply fantastic. This strategy is further evident in *The Mad Man*'s pornographic descriptions, which are – despite their sexual excesses and monstrous dimensions – not qualitatively different from Delany's descriptions of his own sexual experiences in *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (*TSR, TSB*), a text that consists of two long essays, the first of which is autobiographical and "look[s] at the activity and people [mostly male/homosexual] on the corner of Forty-second Street and Eighth Avenue," especially in and around this area's now closed porn movie houses (xv). In this sense, as Ray Davis argues, "the world implied by … [*The Mad Man*], and the genre it seems to inhabit, is unmistakeably that of mainstream realism"

[12] The term "pornotopic fantasy" doubly highlights the fantastic status of Delany's novel: in using the term "fantasy," and in deriving "pornotopia" from "utopia" (literally translated as "no place").

(181). "*The Mad Man*," Davis reiterates, "is a realistic novel where sex involves fantasizing oneself into cartoonish roles" (182).

Pushing grotesque aesthetic mode's historical link with constructions of masculinity and homosocial spaces to a logical conclusion, *The Mad Man*'s naturalistic descriptions of various gay male sexual acts, such as the following (relatively tame one) from early in the novel –

> I got another [yoni] ring out [of his foreskin] and a third one, then a fourth. When I'd sucked them clean of their salt curd … I spit them into his hands. He slid them into his pocket, as I went back for the last two. I thrust my tongue inside his rumpled, cheese-filled folds. When the tip worked in enough to touch the head of his cock, he sighed, … then said, sort of absently: "I think it's about time for me to *fuck* this bitch." (33)

– together with the novel's realist setting and characters, are how the excessiveness of its sexual acts and the bodies caught up in them are presented as the imaginary Real. As such, these acts and bodies are fantastic and real. Like the creature from the proem, they exist in a pornotopia that is "at once a place (the real Upper West Side) and a non-place (a site of impossible sexual relations)" (Davidson 17).

In *TSR, TSB* Delany notes that "[t]he sight of genitals when you don't expect them – in a public space, say – astonishes. The heart pounds. The stomach clutches. This is what makes exposure a violation. But it is not the greatest astonishment in the world. And acclimation mitigates it. … (And when we are astonished, we often laugh; which is healthy, if the shock signals no danger)" (22). Is this not an apt description of grotesque anxiety as described above? Within this context, the novel's attempt to astonish by showing – to disgust, arouse, and arouse laughter – is a sign of its strategy of short-circuiting the distance between the thing and its representation, and of the dual situatedness of its narrative. One: as textual, the novel is in the

realm of the fantastic that forms a "dimension of all representation" (Scott, *Extravagant Abjection* 209). It thus operates "on and with the fantasies of its consumers," the direct practice and materialization of which are not vitally important, as even without this materialization "the shaping of fantasies we experience individually or share in dispersed or mass collectives is of paramount value in the sociogenic[13] process [symbolic/material creation of subjectivities and communities] being carried out by this and other texts" (209). Two: at the same time, the novel is extra-textual, and as such plastic. Its discourse, as Malabou notes via Lyotard, "is not a homogenous milieu; it is divisive because it exteriorizes the sensible opposite itself" (qtd. in *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing* 56). Or, as Darieck Scott writes, "we ought not to lose sight of the *possibility* of actually practicing what *The Mad Man* describes. … What is represented in the novel is not prescriptive but also is not without material referent or 'real' implication" (209).

Scott is here highlighting that which makes the verbal images of *The Mad Man* an example of the imaginary Real (something we also saw in the Gonzo praxis of Acosta and Thompson). The physical reactions which (pornography in general and) the novel in particular evokes – made grotesque by its intense focus on bodily openings, on bodies' filth and excretions and their consumption, and the virtual presence of the proem's creature in the monstrously large bodies and phalluses of homeless men the narrator/protagonist, John Marr, has sex with – are a product of the process Kant describes, in which the representation of an object is no longer differentiated in our apprehension from the object itself. Testifying to the plasticity (the mutual receiving and giving of form between the discursive and the extra-discursive spheres) of

[13] Scott defines *sociogeny* via Frantz Fanon as "the cultural construction of blackness," or a "creation … of the *figure* of blackness, in a Western culture that renders itself psychopathological … by the invention and incorporation of the figure" (38 – 39). Of course, sociogeny as a process can be applied to figures other than 'blackness.'

Delany's writing, the overall effect of this smudging of the border between the thing and its representation is anxiety, an affect that can thus be seen as operative both in the realm of the Symbolic (as discursive) and in that of the (imaginary) Real.

In Lacanian terms, anxiety is thus, on one hand, "the uniquely human affect" because "only human beings become subjects qua speaking beings," one of the results of which is, "by virtue of the mediation of signifiers, a loss of any (pre)supposed immediacy at the level of affective experience" (Johnston and Malabou 151). Anxiety here registers "the speaking being's capture in a discourse, where this discourse determines its status as object" (Lacan, qtd. in Johnston and Malabou 147 – 148). In *The Mad Man*, this meaning of anxiety is explored through the use and manipulation of signifiers of desire, including stories of child abuse and racist discourse. Echoing the Lacanian adage *il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel* ("There is no [unmediated] sexual relationship"), *The Mad Man* represents sexual desire as deeply implicated in discursive structures surrounding and built by human subjects. In it, as in the Return to Nevèrÿon series, sexual desire is shown to be structurally related to, most directly, discourses of class and race. In Nevèrÿon, for example, the fantasy's Conan-like protagonist's (named Gorgik) "campaign to abolish slavery is enabled by the semiotic understanding of slavery's relations of submission and domination, relations that are exposed as artificial social roles instead of 'natural' social positions when performed in a sexual context" (Tucker, qtd. in Keizer 691). Here, the slave-collar is wrested away from one of its semiotic fields (economic and socio-political) and placed into another (sexual), whereby its meaning in the first is affected.

In *The Mad Man*, desire's discursive aspect is brought forth through Marr's sexual attraction to homeless men. More specifically, it is explored through a loving relationship between Marr and one of these men, Leaky, and their use of stories of child abuse and of racist

language to stir up desire in one another. After one such story narrated by Leaky, for example, Marr tells him: "Leaky … you are a lying scumbag sack of shit," to which Leaky responds, "It's a good story though – don't it get you hard?" After accepting Leaky's riposte, Marr wonders "how you get off on people calling you ignorant, dumb, and stupid," to which Leaky responds:

> Now, that's a funny one. I told you about them tests … I had to take when I was a kid. But the truth is, I don't really know that happened, either. I mean, it had *already* happened by then. … But it sure do get me off – like tellin' Tony how low he is. With me it's stupid. With you it's callin' you a piss-drinkin' nigger scumbag cocksucker. Maybe it teaches you how to handle it. With me, I think, it has somethin' to do with my never learnin' how to read and write. But I sure know I like it. … Probably, though, it's just some kind of perversion. (400)

Placing the origin of desire in the realm of the pre-discursive unknown – "I don't really know that happened … it had *already* happened by then" – Marr and Leaky's relationship is built around consensual discursive structures they bring with them and develop together. Various socially and racially charged signifiers are, furthermore, shown to be easily cathected, which testifies to the plasticity of signifying (linguistic and non-linguistic) systems, in the same way in which Gorgik's use of the slave collar as a signifier and implement of desire does so in the stories of Nevèrÿon. In this context, anxiety emerges as an affective response to the plasticity of desire and of signification, and of the dialectical relationship between the two. This dialectical relationship is explored in the novel through grotesque bodies – epitomised by Gorgik in Nevèrÿon and by Mad Man Mike who has "arms … like sacks of sulfurous rocks," a "blocky head" and a "broad, frog-like face" and is "a strong, comfortable bear" of a man with "fingers … that made you think of clubs," "the biggest cock you've ever seen" and "near-black avocado

pears that were his nuts" (366 – 368) – and the sexual acts these bodies engage in. Desire – as (first) discursive and (then) extra-discursive – here emerges as the voice through which bodies communicate and which transforms these bodies into (desire's) objects. This is the beginning of what was earlier described as the exchange between being and beings, where after Dasein perceives itself and being as separate from beings, it quickly realizes its own non-thingness not only as an object but also as being. Dasein here realizes its essence as changed in advance and its own alterity and strangeness as one of/with beings.

Therefrom, the human animal's emerging consciousness of this capture in discourse, whereby its status as *object* is determined, gives rise to a *direct experience* of anxiety that Malabou describes via Heidegger as a potential exchange between being and beings. Human animal as subject here becomes fully aware of both its status as object (a sexualised body, one of the beings) and its status as subject (being). Discourse thus becomes what Adrian Johnston calls "life [or nature] 2.0." As he explains, summarizing Žižek:

> Symbolic mediation (i.e. the passage of the substantial protosubject into the enveloping milieus of language structures) creates a subject (i.e. the *Cogito*-like subject-as-$ central to Kantian and post-Kantian German idealism) that thereafter escapes reduction to either bodily nature … or linguistic culture…; this could be described as a sort of immanent structural genesis of transstructural subjectivity. (Johnston and Malabou 170)

Created within discourse but becoming trans-structural, this human subject – further explored in my discussions of the symbolic Real and the real Real – emerges as lack of structural solidity or presence. The (transcendental) signifiers of this (lack of) structure (à la Lacanian *phallus*) are plasticity and metamorphosis, marked by the prefix non- and ontologically enabled by the possibility of absence.

As Lacan writes of development of subjectivity in childhood, "[S]ecurity of [mother's] presence is found in the possibility of absence. What is most anxiety-producing for the child is when the relationship through which he comes to be – on the basis of lack which makes him desire – is most perturbed: when there is no possibility of lack, when his mother is constantly on his back" (qtd. in Fink, *The Lacanian Subject* 53). Additionally, as Žižek then elaborates via Lacan, the lack that emerges in the Symbolic produces its own anxiety: the 'pure' subject's "very detachment from immediate immersion in life-experiences gives rise to new … affects: anxiety and horror. Anxiety as correlative to confronting the Void that forms the core of the subject [in the Symbolic]; horror as the experience of disgusting life at its purest, 'undead' life [represented by the imaginary Real]" (*Parallax View* 227). This is a dialectical return to "life [or nature] 1.0 (i.e. naked, primitive life *an sich* once it has been retroactively affected by the genesis of life 2.0)" (Johnston and Malabou 173), imaged in Delany's novel by the proem's creature. As Johnston adds, human animal is therefore a being of temporal torsions, a product of "incomplete, partial denaturalizations failing to eliminate without undigested leftovers the vestiges of things other than the sociosymbolically mediated structures and phenomena of human history both phylogenetic and ontogenetic" (173) – we are all, in a sense, non-dead.

Desire as displayed in *The Mad Man* and discussed above can, in this context, be seen as extra-discursive (natural, but in a limited sense). While we can safely claim that Nature (purely Natural desire) as "balanced, harmonious One-All" does not exist (Johnston and Malabou 173), we are compelled to accept that nature does exist,

> both as that which immanently allows for and generates the denaturalizations involved with subjectivity [i.e. material/organic plasticity of the brain], and as a bundle of anachronistic variables, within the substance of human being, out of joint with various

> and sundry aspects of more current historical-temporal milieus [material/organic plasticity of the body]. Nature is a participant in this unbalanced ensemble of conflicting elements … constitutive of the "human condition." (173)

As that which allows for denaturalization (or plasticity) within the realm of the Symbolic, the natural (desire) emerges as plasticity of the (human) organism in The Mad Man *via grotesque sexual acts, as an eye/I at the edge of (and, paradoxically, prior to) discourse* (I will discuss this at greater length below). The proximity of this desire – what Lacan calls the Real kernel of one's *jouissance*, or *objet petit a* – evokes anxiety as "an 'objective feeling.' It is a '*feeling which does not deceive*' (Lacan), one which indicates that we have come near to the 'object' (designating the extimate place of our *jouissance*)" (Zupančič 144).

From one perspective, this object is nothing but the remainder of a Symbolic process: it is "symbolization, in its very perfection and completeness, [that] produces … [it as] a surplus which 'undermines' it from within by engendering impasses" (Zupančič 191). Yet, from a different perspective (or, seen from the other eyes of the Janus-faced figure), this Real kernel of one's *jouissance* or *objet petit a*, is precisely life 2.0: the pre-discursive plasticity of the body/brain that *unilaterally determines* or allows for the plasticity of and within the Symbolic. *Symbolic plasticity (discursivity built on the Void that forms the core of the subject) is therefore simultaneously – as we will further explore below – plenitude as material plasticity that exists as the organic stratum of the composition of the human animal as subject*.

In Delany's *The Mad Man*, this is illustrated by the loving relationship (or familial structure) between Marr and Leaky, which emerges out of the Dionysian engagement between Marr and various homeless men. Here, the (literal and figurative) messiness of sexual

relationships (their non-structurality) allows for the emergence of a structure that reveals for Marr the sort of plenitude made possible by life 2.0:

> A kind of physical relaxation comes after orgasm which is wonderful and satisfying and makes you fall into the heaviest of sleeps; but that's not what I'm talking about here – although, because I'd just dropped a second load twenty minutes ago, that feeling might have been mixed in with it. But there's another, psychological peace, which, were I religious, I'd describe by saying, it feels like you're doing what God intended you to do – like you're filling the space God intended you to fill. Perhaps it's the feeling of desire – not want, or need, or yearning, but desire itself – satisfied. Finally satisfied. Not a God believer, I'm willing to accept the God in that feeling as a metaphor. Yet, it seemed to me, here I'd found the point where the metaphor and the thing it's a metaphor for *might* be one. Lying there, I thought: People feel guilty about *wanting* to do stuff like this. But this is the reward for actually *doing* it, for finding someone who wants to do it with you: The fantasies of it may be drenched in shame, but the act culminates in the knowledge no one has been harmed, no one has been wounded, no one has been wronged. … Could two, I wondered, or, indeed, even more people, feel this in the same way, over one encounter? Was this – here – the 'home' Leaky's scabrous childhood was trying to reach for in its bizarre recounting? (344 – 345)

In this passage, Delany deploys recognizable, even clichéd, tropes that religion or popular romance novels often use in regressive ways; the conservative significations of nostalgia (home, God, plenitude, presence) seem to reverberate throughout the passage. Yet at the same time, in light of its narrative context, the place where the metaphor and the thing it's a metaphor for *might* become one is a mark of a kind of evental reality where the ethics of consensus takes place

beyond the pale of traditional conceptualizations of terms such as home, God, and plenitude. Urophagia, coprophagia, use of racist language and of stories of child abuse in many ways place this apparently traditional scene beyond, in many ways, even the multicultural ethos that marks our contemporary hegemony.

Through discourses of desire – Leaky's bizarre recountings – Leaky and Marr reach the place of plenitude as something other than writing in writing, not as speaking or presence, nor as something that introduces logocentrism. Rather, they reach this place of plenitude as elaborated above: a place where, when viewed from one perspective, there is nothing but (a) Void generating discursive/Symbolic plasticity that allows and (ethically) condones a plurality of familial configurations; but when viewed from another perspective, there is also material plenitude as plasticity: bodies and acts these bodies engage in. Both of these aspects can be termed desire – not want, or need, or yearning – in a sense that desire can be seen as either Lacanian (a place of lack, life 1.0) or as Deleuze-Guattarian (a material machine generating possibilities, life 2.0). This second aspect of desire is evident in the above excerpted passage from *The Mad Man* in the "physical relaxation [that] comes after orgasm" Marr is experiencing. The fact that this *physical* relaxation is "not what [Marr is] talking about" is significant in this context, in light of our observation that the material plasticity encapsulated by this form of desire exists on the outer borders of discourse, even if it is revealed by it. "That's not what I'm talking about" thus ought to be read as "That's not what I *am consistently able to* talk about." Consequently, because he recently "dropped a second load," a *feeling,* an affect that must be understood as a physical manifestation of the body, emerges *in* discourse as something that "*might* … [be] mixed in with" what emerges *as* discourse.

The progressive ethico-political valences of the use of the grotesque this excerpt evokes here become notable. Within the context provided by Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*, which is a touchtone for the study of the grotesque in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the "horror and anxiety" (Meindl 19) provoked by representations of violent tearings-apart of human bodies find their sources in "the confrontation between a subjective and individualist outlook – as cultivated by the romantic hero and artist [as well as today's consumerist subject] – and what negates this outlook: all-embracing primordial life as conveyed by the grotesque" (19). The attack upon the unity of the body is an attack upon the organism's self-sufficiency, its wholeness. As such, the grotesque posits "the possible as such" as what Meillassoux, in a different context, describes as "*necessarily* … un-totalizable" (127). This is what imbues the grotesque with "an ontological scope" in contrast to theories/aesthetic modes that "allow for some sort of conceivability of the All" and are therefore "merely ontical in scope" (Meillassoux 127 – 128). (I will return to this in the discussion of the real Real features of the grotesque.)

Kristeva's notion of the *abject*, which "notifies us of the limits of the human universe" (11), functions in the same ontological/aesthetic register and clarifies somewhat the political use of the grotesque in Delany: "In the presence of signified death," she writes,

> I would understand, react, or accept. … [But] refuse and corpses [and, I would add, dissevered or opened but living bodies] *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. … There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. … It is no longer I who expel, "I" is expelled. The border has become an object. (3 – 4)

Following this argument, and within the ethico-political register rather than the ontologico-aesthetic one, grotesque representations of the human body are difficult to confront because of

their assault upon what can be seen as the last sacred object of the contemporary world: the human body as the border separating me from you-as-subject-and-object. This assault is yet another aspect of the ex/change between beings and being, another instantiation of their plasticity. In light of the grotesque's smudging of the border between representation of a thing and the thing itself in our apprehension, the representation of a deformed or opened body (as a representation) is here a direct attack upon *my* coherence and individuality (as the thing represented). As the invisible principle – the Benjaminian aura, which in the age of mechanical reproduction takes refuge in photographs of "the human countenance" and its expressions of "melancholy, incomparable beauty" (226); the Derridian *logos*, the privileged presence of "the Word, the Divine Mind, the infinite understanding of God, an infinitely creative subjectivity, and, closer to our time, *the self-presence of full self-consciousness*" (Spivak lxviii, emphasis added); the Lacanian ideal ego[14], which "situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual

[14] This is how Žižek describes Lacan's uses of the terms *ideal ego*, *Ego-Ideal*, and *superego*: "Freud uses three distinct terms for the agency that propels the subject to act ethically: he speaks of ideal ego (*Idealich*), ego-ideal (*Ich-Ideal*) and superego (*Ueberich*). He tends to identify these three terms: he often uses the expression *Ichideal oder Idealich* (Ego-Ideal or ideal ego), and the title of the chapter III of his booklet *The Ego and the Id* is 'Ego and Superego (Ego-Ideal).' Lacan introduces a precise distinction between these three terms: the 'ideal ego' stands for the idealized self-image of the subject (the way I would like to be, I would like others to see me); the Ego-Ideal is the agency whose gaze I try to impress with my ego image, the big Other who watches over me and propels me to give my best, the ideal I try to follow and actualize; and the superego is this same agency in its revengeful, sadistic, punishing, aspect. The underlying structuring principle of these three terms is clearly Lacan's triad Imaginary-Symbolic-Real: ideal ego is imaginary, what Lacan calls the 'small other,' the idealized double-image of my ego; Ego-Ideal is symbolic, the point of my symbolic identification, the point in the big Other from which I observe (and judge) myself; superego is real, the cruel and insatiable agency which bombards me with impossible demands and which mocks my failed attempts to meet them, the agency in the eyes of which I am all the more guilty, the more I try to suppress my 'sinful' strivings and meet its demands" (*How to Read Lacan* Chapter 6: <http://www.lacan.com/essays/?p=182>).

alone" (Lacan, "The Mirror Stage" 1165) – as the invisible principle of the contemporary world, this border *ought not, must not* be objectified. It is only as sacred that it continues to function.

In this sense, following Žižek, we can call this sacred 'object' *the sublime object of ideology*, as long as we remember that the term object here paradoxically signifies exactly the prohibition of this thing's objectification. As Žižek writes in the context of Marx's analysis of money:

> Here we have touched a problem unsolved by Marx, that of the *material* character of money: not of the empirical, material stuff money is made of, but the *sublime* material, of that other 'indestructible and immutable' body which persists beyond the corruption of the body physical – this other body of money is like the corpse of the Sadeian victim which endures all torments and survives with its beauty immaculate. This immaterial corporeality of the 'body within the body' gives us a … definition of the sublime object … [which] depends on the symbolic order: the indestructible 'body-within-the-body' exempted from the effects of wear and tear is always sustained by the guarantee of some symbolic authority. (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* 12 – 13)

This elaboration of the sublime body, incidentally, reveals the primary difference between the function of the sublime aesthetic mode and that of the grotesque: while the sublime object always "survives with its beauty immaculate," the grotesque object never does. Kant's argument – that the sublime causes "displeasure" by "doing violence to our imagination" (*Judgement* 129) while it simultaneously causes "pleasure" when "the very same violence that is inflicted on the subject by the imagination is judged as purposive for the whole vocation of the mind [i.e. for Reason]" (142) – is rooted in this ontological feature of the sublime: the preservation of beauty

in the face of violence[15]. This is why Lacan argues that Sade's *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, which comes eight years after Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*, also gives the *Critique*'s truth: Sade is here "the inaugural step of a subversion, of which, however amusing it might seem with respect to the coldness of the man, Kant is the turning point" ("Kant with Sade" 55).

Delany's difference from Sade is here important to note. The narrative strategies of Sade and Delany are relatively similar. As Jonathan Kemp notes, like Sade, *The Mad Man* "seems to be endlessly cataloguing … sexual acts in order to move beyond mere pornography, to enter a terrain of ethics, even boredom." Yet, unlike Delany, Sade preservers the defiled object's sublime stratum through his "closet Kantian[ism]" (Žižek, "Kant and Sade"). As Žižek notes, the fundamental Sadean fantasy of an "ethereal body" that "can be tortured indefinitely and nonetheless magically retains its beauty" is "the libidinal foundation of the Kantian postulate of the immortality of the soul endlessly striving to achieve ethical perfection" ("Kant and Sade"). Conversely, the fundamental fantasy of Delany's *The Mad Man* is the creature from the novel's proem: a grotesque monster who, like the protagonist, "instead of shielding himself from that which others consider to be abject … swings his face into the arc and swallows" (Foltz 44). Delany, writes Ray Davis, is "Sade as gritty realism" (173). Defilement is here not simply inscribed upon the surface of the body. Rather, it reaches into the centre of subjectivity, replacing its fundamental fantasy for "the fantasy of subjective wholeness" (Foltz 47). Like the novel in its entirety, Delany's protagonist "creates an ethos of 'self-shattering' that revels in the consumption of the waste of the cityscape and the physical body" (47). In doing this, Delany/

[15] This is also what allows Victor Hugo to argue that "the ugly exists beside the beautiful, the unshapely beside the graceful, *the grotesque on the reverse of the sublime*, evil with good, darkness with light" (345) and that "while the sublime represents the soul as it is, purified by Christian morality, the grotesque plays the part of the human beast" (349 – 50).

Marr "shows that there is pleasure in the holes of the body in opposition to the wholeness. … Detritus does not move to the fringe, but becomes the center of the subject ever reminded of his rupture" (47). In abjection, *detritus* becomes the transcendental signifier we earlier named plasticity: its essential modifiability makes of it a Symbolic (structural) Void while also acting as the apotheosis of the material/organic as such. Detritus's penchant for organic change and decomposition justifies this replacement. Delany thus shows us that "we cannot alter our movements in the world unless we first enter a transformative moment through which identity is sacrificed in favor of *pleasurable decomposition of the self or in a marring of the subject*" (Foltz 47, emphasis added) – a marring of which anxiety is a constitutive part.

Therefore, while Sade preserves the sublime stratum of the violated human body – in the Christian tradition best illustrated by the God-function of Jesus's tortured body almost pornographically depicted in Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) – Delany "dramatizes in his fiction a countermystical experience or possibility" in the image of "the divine as human" that "we come to by experiencing the self … as incomplete, fragmented, as a false self, not-self, nameless and monstrous, in the dizzyingly myriad pieces of its warty chimerical glory" (Scott, "Delany's Divinities" 720). This is, once again, the Lacanian dimension of Delany's text which recognizes the "non-pathological, a priori object-cause" of desire (Žižek, "Kant and Sade"). "This object," concludes Žižek, is "what Lacan call *objet petit a*" which we already described – via its dual role in the Symbolic and the (imaginary) Real – as plasticity. The ethical dimensions of this plasticity emerge explicitly in Marr's narration: "Call it structure. Call it whatever you want," Marr begins. "The same thing that seems so abhorrent in Sade, when it actually occurs among people of good will … is as reassuring as a smile or a warm hand

on your shoulder, or a sharp, friendly smack on the ass[16]" (391). This is not simply an injection (from some 'outside') of consensus into a Sadean scenario. Rather, the plastic structure of the narrative context that removes the sublime object from the Sadean 'ethereal body' allows for the objective dimension of the individual being/body to emerge (body becomes an object among objects). As such, this being becomes shareable and exploitable in a way in which objects are, without erasing the subjective dimension of this being. The ethics of consent therefore rests on the grotesque/abject logic of the story's context, which is an immanent rather than a transcendental process.

In contrast, the sublime object, this sacred principle of separation that both Kant and Sade preserve, does two things in the context of the Symbolic order. On the one hand, it supports the *principium individuationis* of which Nietzsche, via Schopenhauer, writes in relation to the Apollonian principle of Greek Tragedy: "Just as in a stormy sea that, unbounded in all directions, raises and drops mountainous waves, howling, a sailor sits in a boat and trusts in his frail bark: so in the midst of a world of torments the individual human being sits quietly, supported by and trusting in the *principium individuationis*" (Schopenhauer, qtd. in Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* 36). Opposed to the Dionysian principle rooted in the "terror" *and* "blissful ecstasy that well[ ] from the innermost depth of man, indeed of nature, at [the] collapse" of this principle of individuation (36), *principium individuationis* is an existential category which gives support to the Symbolic *principle of individualism*.

This Symbolic principle is operative in what Alain Badiou calls today's "natural belief" – ideology, by another name – that is "condensed in a single statement [we discussed earlier]: *There are only bodies and languages*" (*Logics of Worlds* 1). A principle of "democratic

[16] In this sense, *Hogg*, Delany's earliest pornographic novel in which graphic sexual acts are far closer to cruelty is much more Sadean than *The Mad Man*.

materialism," this natural belief is bipartite, yet unified in its operational logic. On the one hand, the body is one and *it is mine*, a 'fact' proven through enjoyment: "[T]he body is the only concrete instance for productive individuals aspiring to enjoyment. Man, under the sway of the 'power of life,' is an animal convinced that the law of the body harbours the secret of his hope" (*Logics of Worlds* 2). On the other hand, a collection of individuals (a nation, a culture, a race, a gender, etc.) is demarcated by the common language/discourse they speak. There is thus a "plurality of languages," and their "juridical equality" is presupposed (2). Delimited by "a global halting point for its multiform tolerance" which stipulates that a "language that does not recognize the universal and juridical and normative equality of languages does not deserve to benefit from this equality" (2), this *ideology of multiculturalism* is "the ideal form of ideology of … global capitalism[17]" (Žižek, "Multiculturalism" 44). It concretises the principle of individualism within the context of a group by actuating a group-border, a sacred object that *ought not* be objectified. This sacred object is an actualization of the principle of individualism

[17] "The ideal form of ideology of this global capitalism is multiculturalism, the attitude which, from a kind of empty global position, treats *each* local culture the way the colonizer treats colonized people – as 'natives' whose mores are to be carefully studied and 'respected.' That is to say, the relationship between traditional imperialist colonialism and global capitalist self-colonization is exactly the same as the relationship between Western cultural imperialism and multiculturalism: in the same way that global capitalism involves the paradox of colonization without the colonizing Nation-State metropole, multi-culturalism involves patronizing Eurocentrist distance and/or respect for local cultures without roots in one's own particular culture. In other words, multiculturalism is a disavowed, inverted, self-referential form of racism, a 'racism with a distance' – It 'respects' the Other's identity, conceiving the Other as a self-enclosed 'authentic' community towards which he, the multiculturalist, maintains a distance rendered possible by his privileged universal position. Multiculturalism is a racism which empties its own position of all positive content (the multiculturalist is not a direct racist, he doesn't oppose to the Other the *particular* values of his own culture), but nonetheless retains this position as the privileged *empty point of universality* from which one is able to appreciate (and depreciate) properly other particular cultures – the multiculturalist respect for the Other's specificity is the very form of asserting one's own superiority" (Žižek, "Multiculturalism" 44).

on the group level – the group is one and *it is mine/ours* – and it is also "the privileged *empty point of universality* from which one is able to appreciate (and depreciate) properly other particular cultures" (44).

The grotesque image, by objectifying this sacred object in a manner elaborated by Kristeva and as deployed in Delany, adds Badiou's third element to this bipartite schema, transforming the logic of democratic materialism into that of the *materialist dialectic*. Materialist dialectic's maxim modifies the maxim of democratic materialism by formulating it so that "the Three supplements the reality of the Two: *There are only bodies and languages, except that there are truths*" (*Logics of Worlds* 4). These truths that supplement bodies and languages of democratic materialism are "incorporeal bodies, language devoid of meaning, generic infinites, unconditioned supplements. They become and remain suspended, like the poet's conscience, 'between the void and the pure event'" (4): the void at the centre of discursivity and the pure event as plasticity of the organism/subject. While also potentially expressed through other means and in other contexts (for Badiou there they are art, love, politics, and science), these truths are within the present discussion rooted in grotesque's ontological status as necessarily contingent, a notion I will expound in my discussion of the grotesque as the real Real.

The epitome of truth as supplemental to bodies and languages in *The Mad Man* emerges in a terrifying scene of rape, a scene that is simultaneously an illustration of this logic's acute danger. Near the end of the novel, Crazy Joey, one of the homeless men Marr spends time with, is killed in a hustler bar for giving away that which is in the bar strictly an object of financial transaction. This scene replicates an event in which Mad Man Mike's lover (Timothy Hasler) was killed years ago in identical circumstances (with Mike, now the homeless men's mentor and

protector, playing then the role of Joey). After this, Mike barges into Marr's orgy-defiled apartment on a wall of which the word *EKPYROSIS* (periodic destruction/apocalypse of the cosmos, after which the world is rebuilt) is smeared with shit, and – in a frantic expression of grief and anger – rapes him. This is how Marr narrates the event:

> And the monster within my dark home turned and raged and cried.
>
> He raped me before he left.
>
> In the Mouth.
>
> … [T]here was nothing vaguely sexual in it – not for me. Really, I suspect, not for him either. His stony fingers left bruises on my face and neck. … But if that over-quick and over-thick eruption … meant, for him, even the slightest inward relief, then I'm all right with it. I guess I cooperated.
>
> And not because I didn't want to get more hurt than I actually did. … I didn't want to do it. … (It really *was* a rape!) But I hold nothing against him for it. … Joey's death was neither my fault nor his…. It was all … [that happened] operating together – as a system. The individual elements only made the system manifest. But the only reason I can give you for why I went along with Mad Man's sexual violence toward me – certainly his act was entirely beyond my own moral boundaries and even any sense of my own safety – is that the world owed it to him, owed it to him for the death of Hasler [Mike's lover and the philosopher Marr is studying and inadvertently emulating], for his own life since, and for Crazy Joey. I happened to be there.
>
> The system of the … what?
>
> But yes, I am part of the world. (428 – 429)

In this passage, Marr reveals the extreme objectification of his own body as an outcome of the smearing of the sublime object that makes the depicted sexual exchanges possible, and, more importantly, as a consequence of living in the world in which paying for sex (among other things) makes those who give it away freely objects of neglect and derision.

The rape scene, argues Scott, "suggests that harm and wounds to the body and to the psyche are not far removed from the pleasurable acts that fulfill John's fantasies: that what shapes fantasies – which is in part and centrally the history of enslavement, and racialization through and as humiliation, which *is* (but not en toto, not *only*) harm and wound – lies … dangerously close, separated by gossamer, from the more empowering, fulfilling sublation of that historical material in contemporary, conscious reworking" (*Extravagant Abjection* 244 – 245). In other words, plasticity of this history and of the subject that is its product allows both the history and its subject to be transformed. Nevertheless, this history and its potential to wound are not erased, and Marr's cooperation with it – and with its darkest creations – is not a capitulation to it but rather an attempt to integrate it as "this black-and-abject self in the world that would reject or punish it" (247). Not only does Marr sacrifice his *principium individuationis*, he "liv[es] his black body in its collective, sociogenic dimension, in which the demand for self-protection of that seductive individual *I* is refused in favor of one's becoming immersed in, lost in what it is to *be* the race, precisely as to be black means to have-been-blackened, to have been rendered abject" (245). Marr recognizes his subjectivity and body as radically contingent – "I happened to be there," he notes – and his self becomes a conduit of history, of collectivity, of forces that flow through the body and make it grotesque and abject.

Of course, rape is here a conduit of a truth only insofar it is itself perceived as contingent upon a particular Symbolic constellation within which it occurs. A case of a white man raping a

black one or a man raping a woman would necessarily present a radically different problematic than the one presented above. This is so because relations of power between groups are themselves coded into the history that flows through individual bodies, so that one's freedom to consent can arguably be limited or circumscribed by contingencies of history, the givens of the existing Symbolic order.

The importance of the given Symbolic order is, more generally, always of great importance for the functioning of the grotesque. When Ralf Remshardt writes that intact bodies always double grotesque bodies, he is noting precisely this aesthetic form's general tendency to engage with the given (of the) Symbolic. The grotesque can never stray too far into abstraction because in order to objectify the (sacred) border it must concretise it enough to shock and scandalise. The human form distended must remain recognisably human in order to perform its action "immediately upon the nervous system" (Deleuze, *Francis Bacon* 31). This reveals another aspect of the grotesque as the imaginary Real.

In his analysis of the work of Francis Bacon, Deleuze addresses exactly this aspect of the grotesque (he calls it Figure/sensation). Writing of the practice of painting, Deleuze notes that it has traditionally been trapped in projects of *figuration*, in which the simple mimetic impulse finds its home: "The entire surface [of a painter's canvas] is [always] already invested virtually with all kinds of clichés;" it is "invaded and besieged by photographs and clichés that are already lodged on the canvas before the painter even begins to work" (12). And as on the canvas, so in the Symbolic: the border – the sacred, sublime object of ideology, the ontologico-existential *principium individuationis* – is the kind of cliché Deleuze writes of. As the figurative "claims to *reign over vision*" (12), so the *principium individuationis* claims to reign over the Symbolic; and both are ultimately suspect not because they are untrue or because they function poorly, but

because they are ossifying, because they close off the realm of the ontological – what Deleuze calls the virtual and Badiou the realm of truths – *in the interest of a particular configuration of the ontic* – the actual (Deleuze) as the realm of democratic materialism (Badiou).

"There are two ways," notes Deleuze, "of going beyond [this logic of] figuration (that is, beyond both the illustrative and the figurative):

> either toward the abstract form or toward the Figure. Cézanne gave a simple name to this way of the Figure: sensation. The Figure is the sensible form related to a sensation; it acts immediately upon the nervous system, which is of the flesh, whereas abstract form is addressed to the head and acts through the intermediary of the brain, which is closer to the bone. (*Francis Bacon* 31)

The Figure, exemplified for Deleuze by Francis Bacon, obeys the logic of the grotesque. It eschews the route of abstraction, opting to always directly reference or evoke "the body intact" – the Symbolic, the actual. It does so to better "convey[ ] the violence of [the created] sensation directly to the nervous system" (Smith, "Translator's Introduction" xiii); and in it the redoubled human body, deformed and intact, "plays [the] role of the Figure" which makes this possible: this body "functions as the material support … that sustains a precise sensation" (xiii).

Delany's mixing of realism and fantasy accomplishes this kind of Figuration. His utilisation of realism refuses abstract notions of humanity in favour of specificities of bodies, and the pornographic content furthers this strategy. *The Mad Man* is thus committed to the truths of embodiment, and to the truths of how bodies are put to use. Judith Butler's notion that "the gendered body is performative" and that it therefore "has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality" (185) is, from the perspective of this grotesque logic, only partially correct. While the concrete performative aspect of bodies remains crucial in its

Symbolic elaboration – evidenced by discursive aspects of desire in Delany's novel – this does not and cannot negate the ontological (and actual) stratum of these bodies. I will expand on this notion below, in my discussion of the grotesque as the symbolic Real.

In the context of the present discussion, there is an important consequence of this notion that the ontological stratum of bodies remains operative. While the simplistic notions of (gendered) bodies as biologically determined have been successfully challenged and shown to be fundamentally (practically and theoretically) unviable, the grotesque compels us to – as Steven Shaviro writes in the context of his analysis of Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and aesthetics – "conciliate [our] arguments with the findings of experimental science" (*Without Criteria* 24). Even though physical sciences may not be "altogether adequate for comprehending reality," being a "necessary condition for understanding the world but not a sufficient one" (24), the grotesque's commitment to the truths of bodies and embodiment, and to the truths of how these bodies are put to use, does not allow us to "ignore the physical chain of causality that is at work in a given event" even if "we do not want our explanation to stop there" (25). In other words, ontology as "the most generic account of what exists … must be informed by empirical science" (Maudlin, *Metaphysics* 78). The physical chain of causality as gleaned by empirical sciences is a window into the *objet petit a* as organic plasticity.

The corollary of this assertion is that, as a representation of what Deleuze calls *meat* – "the state of the body in which flesh and bone confront each other locally" as "the flesh seems to descend from the bones, while the bones rise up from the flesh;" meat, which is "the common zone of man and the beast, their zone of indiscernibility" (Deleuze, *Francis Bacon* 20 – 21) – the grotesque suggests that we should "guard against the error of mistaking the structure of language

for the structure of the world itself[18]" (Maudlin, *Metaphysics* 79). As we will explore further when we look at the grotesque as the symbolic Real, this orientation of the grotesque toward the truths of embodiment allows us to locate ourselves "on a continuum with all of our evolutionary brothers and sisters" (Churchland 5). The "price we have to pay to meet" this ethically "responsible … theory" is "to give up the linguaformal 'judgment' or 'proposition' as the presumed unit of knowledge or representation" (5) in favour of what we can term *thinking through the body*: "We do of course use language … but [language and] language-like structures do not embody the basic machinery of cognition. Evidently they do not do so for animals, and not for humans either, because the human neuronal machinery, overall, differs from that of other animals in various small degrees, but not in fundamental kind" (Churchland 5).

The grotesque as imaginary Real, then, must preserve the actuality of bodies and these bodies' specificities. This is both this aesthetic form's advantage and its inherent *political and ethical* danger, a danger that parallels the danger represented by Delany in *The Mad Man*'s rape scene. Deleuze and Guattari's repeated calls for caution when constructing a (grotesque) BwO must here be taken seriously: "Not wisdom, caution. In doses. As a rule immanent to experimentation: injections of caution. Many have been defeated in this battle" (150)[19]. *Extreme*

[18] Allow me, at the risk of seeming naïve, to quote Bertrand Russell: "Reflection on philosophical problems has convinced me that a much larger number than I used to think, or than is generally thought, are connected with the principles of symbolism, that is to say, with the relation between what means and what is meant. In dealing with highly abstract matters it is much easier to grasp the symbols (usually words) than it is to grasp what they stand for. The result of this is that almost all thinking that purports to be philosophical or logical consists in attributing to the world the properties of language" (qtd. in Maudlin, *Metaphysics* 79).

[19] As Deleuze and Guattari further write: "What does it mean to disarticulate, to cease to be an organism? How can we convey how easy it is, and the extent to which we do it every day? And how necessary caution is, the art of dosages, since overdose is a danger. You don't do it with a sledgehammer, you use a very fine file.

caution is the maxim of the post-*Anti Oedipus* (published in 1972) era; the watchword of a generation that rode "the crest of a high and beautiful wave," a wave that peaked in "San Francisco [and Paris] in the middle [and late] sixties," and which, until then, spread "madness in any direction, at any hour" along with "a fantastic universal sense that whatever we were doing was *right*, that we were winning" (Thompson, *Fear and Loathing* 67 – 68). *Extreme caution* is the watchword of a generation that witnessed this wave's "high-water mark – that place where the wave finally broke and rolled back" (68), giving rise to Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan, as well as the works of Hunter S. Thompson and Brett Easton Ellis.

This cautioning, then, is an ethical imperative. In face of the postmodern[20] superego injunction[21], *Enjoy!* – which strives to ignore the breaking and rolling back of the wave

---

Dismantling the organism has never meant killing yourself, but rather opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage, circuits, conjunctions, levels and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensity, and territories and deterritorializations [i.e. actual bodies and their virtual transformations] measured with the craft of the surveyor. … Caution is the art common to all three; if in dismantling the organism there are times one courts death, in slipping away from signifiance and subjection one courts falsehood, illusion and hallucination and psychic death. … You have to keep enough of the organism for it to reform each dawn; and you have to keep small supplies of signifiance and subjectification, if only to turn them against their own systems when the circumstances demand it" (159 – 60). And again: "Every undertaking of destratification (…going beyond the organism, plunging into a becoming) must … observe concrete rules of extreme caution: a too-sudden destratification may be suicidal, or turn cancerous. … [I]t will sometimes end in chaos, the void and destruction, and sometimes lock us back into the strata, which become more rigid still, losing their degrees of diversity, differentiation, and mobility" (503).

[20] Following Frederic Jameson, and Antonio Negri and Micheal Hardt, I take the terms 'postmodernity' and 'postmodernism' to signify the era, and the accompanying artistic and theoretical practices, of late-stage (contemporary) capitalism.

[21] Žižek writes: "The superficial opposition between pleasure and duty is overcome in two different ways. Totalitarian power goes even further than traditional authoritarian power. What it says, in effect, is not, 'Do your duty, I don't care whether you like it or not,' but: 'You must do your duty, and you must enjoy doing it.'

Thompson describes and which is reflected in Brian Massumi's observations that capitalism diversifies affect in order to extract surplus-value and that this marks a convergence between the dynamics of capitalist power and the resistance to it – in face of this, the Deleuze-Guattarian injunction to practice extreme caution is premised on the necessity of always maintaining links with the actual, with the empirical, and, hence, of never "ignor[ing] the physical chain of causality that is at work in a given event" (Shaviro, *Without Criteria* 25). The grotesque as imaginary Real is the aesthetic embodiments of this ethical injunction.

The Symbolic Real Grotesques

Opening up the representational/phenomenal/virtual internal spacetime to the physical external spacetime – bringing them into proximity, forcing them together, folding them into one another – through the image of a deformed, opened up body is the fundamental *modus operandi* of the grotesque as the symbolic Real. Here, we encounter (the grotesque's engagement with) the *plasticity of time*. Already in her earliest work, Malabou notes that "time and the future are mutually involved in a dialogic process governed by plasticity" (*The Future of Hegel* 5) and it is this process that allows for immanent change and development of Hegelian *Aufhebung*: "[T]he possibility of a [thermodynamically] closed system to welcome new phenomena, all the while transforming itself, is what appears as plasticity" (193). This, as this work has argued, is also the basic ontological gesture/structure of the grotesque aesthetic mode. As absence of stability, as

---

(This is how totalitarian democracy works: it is not enough for the people to follow their leader, they must love him.) Duty becomes pleasure. Second, there is the obverse paradox of pleasure becoming duty in a 'permissive' society. Subjects experience the need to 'have a good time', to enjoy themselves, as a kind of duty, and, consequently, feel guilty for failing to be happy. The superego controls the zone in which these two opposites overlap – in which the command to enjoy doing your duty coincides with the duty to enjoy yourself" ("You May!")

metamorphosis, plasticity is governed by temporality. To endure – presence, being present – "means to remain for a certain time" (Malabou, *The Heidegger Change* 138). Conversely, giving and taking form take place as change in a temporal dimension: it is "temporality that permits modification" so that "Dasein [human animal as subject] is the future of man" (264).

We have already seen via several examples how the grotesque aesthetic form elaborates its narrative and representational strategies by manipulating time and space. I have argued, for instance, that R. Crumb's "Stoned Agin" exists dually: as a filmic representation of a slice of time and as a representation of a near instantaneous metamorphosis in which (filled) space (i.e. matter) is stressed over narrative time. Both Crumb's work and that of Francis Bacon, I have further argued, flatten time into what we can, following Bergson, call duration. The present and the past here coexist as planar, so that grotesque images always act as evental and momentary eruptions of corpus within/on the surface of the plane of duration. In the example of the London narratives, we have also seen how Peter Ackroyd, Alan Moore, and Iain Sinclair use different grotesque visual and narrative strategies to open up the space of parallax in which multiple dimensions of time become simultaneously present within the urban (brick and mortar) space of London. This parallax space then becomes a space of ethico-political critique: it refuses the closure of Being in an "attempt to exorcize the Thatcherite abuse of history … by denying … [her] closed narratives" (Murray 18).

Samuel Delany's grotesques are also consistently deployed in intricate (plastic) temporal structures. *The Mad Man*, for example, is organized around a series of repeated events, as John Marr's life echoes that of Timothy Hasler, retroactively revealing Hasler's subjectivity to the reader. Through his sexual activity, then, Marr reveals Hasler as his posited presupposition, thereby linking present eroticism with the past. Fantasy, or sword and sorcery, the "most

despised sub-genre of paraliterary production" (Delany, "Sword & Sorcery" 129) to which the Nevèrÿon tales belong, generally deploys a complex temporal structure. First of all, the various tales which make up the cycle jump back and forth in time, exploring various protagonists' lives as a means of forcing encounters between various discourses: Gorgik, for example, represents a particular kind of discourse on desire and signification; Old Venn, a wandering thinker and storyteller, is used to focus on a more generalized discourse on language and signification and the way these warp and woof with material and practical aspects of culture; Raven, a woman-warrior, represents a matriarchal culture that mirrors/inverts various patriarchal values; and Pryn, a young girl traveller who is a sort of mirror image of Gorgik, is utilised as a set of eyes through which various aspects of a shift from a feudal/rural to an urban/democratic economy are observed. As such, these four texts paint a kind of cubist portrait of the land of Nevèrÿon, representing it from different vantage points and constantly returning to a number of characters and themes: desire, signification, economy, race, slavery, gender, etc.

Furthermore, as Delany notes, this genre "takes place in an a-specific, idealized past…. This means that whatever happens in this vision of the past that may have something to do with us today *doesn't* filter through any recognizable historical events" ("The Semiology of Silence" 155). Nevertheless, like science fiction, fantasy is always "in dialogue with the present" (Delany, "The Second … Interview" 343), and the a-specificity of its setting allows us to "look at the impact of certain cross-cultural concepts" that are often neglected "in historical novels, concepts (like money, writing, weaving, or any early technological advances…) that go so far in over-determining the structure" of issues deemed worthy of historical treatment: war, changes of government, migrations from country to city ("The Semiology" 155). Moreover, the narrative elements that make this genre "historically a-specific also makes it rather anachronistic" (155).

This strengthens fantasy's ability to place different temporalities in contact with one another and is made explicit in the novel-length "The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals," the ninth of Delany's Nevèrÿon tales, which paratactically juxtaposes scenes set in contemporary New York with those set in Nevèrÿon in order to explore the AIDS crisis of the early 1980s. As Daniel Baker observes, anachronism and temporal play of sword and sorcery are ways in which this genre can "represent, interrogate, and alter reality" (440). As elaborating a place "divorced temporally, historically, materially, and/or metaphysically from the extratextual world," fantasy can "go *beyond* and address subjectivity [and history] from differing perspectives" (450). This is the core of this genre's representation of temporal plasticity and of Delany's texts' grotesque logic, to which we will return in the present discussion of the symbolic Real.

In his study of Kant, Deleuze notes how central time and space are to the Kantian project and its revolutionary dimensions, dimensions that culminate in his engagement with aesthetics of the beautiful and the sublime. Kant's notions of time and space emerge out of the debate about the actual nature of these aspects of reality, exemplified by Leibniz's critique of Newton. While for Leibniz "the spatial aspect of the world is nothing but a set of relations among material bodies [i.e. it is relational]," Newton argued that "spatial [and temporal] structure[s are], in the first instance, the structure[s] of Absolute Space [and Time], and hence exist[ ] independently of material bodies [i.e. time and space are absolute]" (Maudlin, "Space" 423). Writing from within this intellectual context, with his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) Kant achieved a reversal according to which time and space are "no longer defined by succession [or as relational] because succession [and spatial relation] concern[ ] only things and movements which are [always/already] in time [and space]" (Deleuze, *Kant* vii).

For Kant, space and time are not directly aspects of sensible reality. Space is "not an empirical concept that has been drawn from outer experiences" because "in order for certain sensations to be related to something outside me … the representation of space must already be their ground" (*Critique of Pure Reason* 174 – 175). Space is thus "a necessary representation, *a priori*, that is the ground of all outer intuitions" (175) and, as such, it is empirically real and transcendentally ideal[22] (177). Similarly, time "is not an empirical concept" but "a necessary representation that grounds all intuitions" (178). It is "merely a subjective condition of our … intuition (which is always sensible, i.e., insofar as we are affected by objects), and in itself, outside the subject, it is nothing. Nonetheless, it is necessarily objective in regard to all appearances, thus also in regard to all things that can come before us in experience" (181). Like space, time is for Kant empirically real and transcendentally ideal.

These conceptualizations of time and space reverberate throughout the Kantian project. Not only does space-and-time – as "the form of everything that changes" but that does not itself change (Deleuze, *Kant* viii) – have to find "completely new determinations" (viii), time also "moves into the subject, in order to distinguish the Ego from the I in it" (ix). Time is, hence,

> the form under which the I affects the ego, that is, the way in which the mind affects itself. It is in this sense that time as immutable form, which could no longer be defined by simple succession, appeared as the form of interiority (inner sense), whilst space,

[22] "Our expositions accordingly teach the **reality** (i.e., objective validity) of space in regard to everything that can come before us externally as an object, but at the same time the **ideality** of space in regard to things when they are considered in themselves through reason, i.e., without taking account of the constitution of our sensibility. We therefore assert the **empirical reality** of space (with respect to all possible outer experience), though to be sure its **transcendental ideality**, i.e., that it is nothing as soon as we leave aside the condition of the possibility of all experience, and take it as something that grounds the things in themselves" (*Critique of Pure Reason* 177).

> which could no longer be defined by coexistence, appeared for its part as the form of exteriority. 'Form of interiority' means not only that time is internal to us, but that our interiority constantly divides us from ourselves, splits us in two. (ix)

Lacan – whose work embodies certain Kantian aspects that are explored by Alenka Zupančič in her *Ethics of the Real* – refers to these two parts of our interiority as the subject of the utterance and the subject of enunciation. He traces this split's origin back to the Cartesian *cogito*, seeing in it the very foundation of modern subjectivity psychoanalysis is interested in exploring. Leaving aside the complex dynamic between these two parts that gives birth to the barred subject, I will simply note how the creation of this split is a fundamentally temporal process: arising in time, during a stage in the child's developmental process (during what Lacan terms the Mirror Stage), the two parts this split gives rise to themselves embody forms of temporality.

Firstly, neither the subject of the utterance nor the subject of enunciation has permanence in time: their nature is "punctual, evanescent" (Fink, *The Lacanian Subject* 42 – 43), emerging in the moment of utterance – "I think" – or as "a breach in discourse," "a fleeting irruption of something foreign or extraneous" (41). Their relationship is, moreover, dialectical and hence inherently temporal: they are "bound together in an oscillating dialectic of entangled, bidirectional influences" (A. Johnston 45). This dialectic functions in two different temporal frames. The first is that of self-consciousness, in which "I (ego-ideal) see myself (ego) as an object, just as the Other does, which is what allows for the Cartesian I think" (Fink, *Lacan to the Letter* 109). Taking place in the Imaginary-Symbolic, this can be described as one aspect of the split that results from time becoming a form of interiority, and that Malabou via Heidegger sees as the emergence of being from beings and their subsequent ex/change. Here, the subject of the utterance is shown to be itself bifurcated – both Imaginary (ego) and Symbolic (ego-ideal) – and

language (the use of the first person pronoun) already acts as what Delany calls the stabilizer of behaviour, thought, and feeling. This stabilization is a suppression of the temporal dimensions of subjectivity via which a child "comes to see herself as if she were the parental Other, comes to be aware of herself as if from the outside, as if she were another person" (Fink, *Lacan to the Letter* 109). A plastic discursive *process* is thus (always only apparently and temporarily, however) turned into being-present (a stable *I*) through suppression of time as the form of inner sense.

Once the dynamic between the ego-ideal and the ego is (somewhat) stabilized, that which interrupts (or changes) it emerges as a force that is "'passively' registered, inscribed, or counted," as "something that is known" but "not something *one* knows," and as something that "does not take itself as an object" (109). This is the subject of enunciation whose character as *plasticity itself* is here revealed as temporal/symbolic Real (in the previous section, we discussed this as plasticity seen as either the symbolic Void or material plenitude). In the present context, the subject of enunciation can also be seen from two (temporal) perspectives. From that of the Symbolic (discursivity), it is registered as always receding: the signifier/symptom (linguistic or otherwise) "sign[s] … [this subject's] death sentence" (Fink, *The Lacanian Subject* 41). The subject of enunciation is usurped or replaced by the signifier; it therefore "has no other being than as a breach in discourse" (41). The temporality registered on this level is that of the *punctum*: virtual (transcendentally ideal and empirically real in the Kantian sense), it exists via the unconscious as a chain of signifiers excluded from consciousness that nevertheless produces actual effects via symptoms/signifiers.

In the realm of the (symbolic) Real, however, the subject of enunciation is – as I will further discuss below – registered as material or organic plasticity that gives the (human) brain

the structure necessary for the elaboration of (Lacanian) subjectivity. "Lacan notice[d] early," writes Bruce Fink, "that the two [parts of the subject] come together in speech" which relies on a system of signifiers as well as "a bodily component" – "breathing and all of the movements of the jaw, tongue, and so on" (*Lacan to the Letter* 144). The temporality of this side of the subject of enunciation is actual (materially real), existing outside of the subject but registered through the plastic physical processes of the brain. As Lacan notes:

> A pest might object here that the unconscious cannot be involved, since … it does not know time. He should go back to grammar class to learn to distinguish the time of chronology – the 'aspect forms' that envision what the subject becomes there on the basis of the enunciation – from the forms that situate the statement on a [material] timeline of events. Then he will stop confusing the subject of the perfective with the presence of the past, and will perhaps wake up to the idea that tension involves time and that identification occurs at a scansion's pace. ("Remarks" 556)

Language, diachronic and situated on a timeline of events, thus registers the reality of material, external temporality within which the process of subjectivation unfolds.

Taken in its non-cohesive totality, therefore, the temporal dimension of the subject of enunciation *can be known* by the way it is revealed as the dynamic between time as the Kantian form of interiority (empirically real and transcendentally ideal) and the temporal process of subject formation *in the brain* that Žižek describes as "the temporality of a circular time in which 'time stops' when, in a convoluted self-relating, the subject posits its own presupposed cause" (*Less Than Nothing* 618). This is time as *plastic* – transcendentally ideal, empirically and materially real – and as consonant with Freud's assertion that the unconscious knows no time (non-time is, in other words, plasticity of time that lacks Being from the perspective of the

Symbolic). "It is in this precise sense," Žižek continues, "that subject and object are correlative: the subject's emergence, its breaking of (cut into, suspension of) the linear causality of 'reality' has a cause, but a cause which is retroactively posited by its own effect. It is this minimal retroactivity, not just some kind of structural 'complexity,' which allows us to pass from linear natural causality [time as materially real, registered through the organic processes of the brain], no matter how complex it is, to structural causality proper [time as transcendentally ideal and empirically real]" (618). This retroactive positing of a cause by its effect is what Malabou via Heidegger describes as Dasein's discovery of its own strangeness/alterity: where "I am what I am – *changed in advance*" both on the organic level and on the level of discourse (*The Heidegger Change* 270).

Kant acknowledges the possibility of time as materially real in his third *Critique*, where he "discovers discord which produces accord" (Deleuze, *Kant* xiii) in the notion that the human faculties (reason, understanding, judgement) are capable of free and unregulated relationships. In these relationships, "each [faculty] goes to its own limit" while showing "the possibility of some sort of harmony with the others" (xi – xii). Via aesthetic experience, Deleuze argues, Kant allows for the sensible to be "valid in itself" (xii), without a conceptual regulation of the faculty of Understanding or a rational/moral regulation of the faculty of Reason. The sensible "unfolds in a *pathos* beyond all logic, which will *grasp time in its surging forth.* … [C]ertain phenomena," then, "which come to define the Beautiful give an autonomous supplementary dimension to the inner sense of time," while the "discordant accord" of the Sublime *in nature* becomes itself "*the source of time*" (xii – xiii, emphasis added).

Using Deleuze and Alfred North Whitehead as a lens for reading Kant, Steven Shaviro describes this trajectory of Kant's thought as "critical aestheticism," noting:

> The Kant with whom we are most familiar … stands behind … Habermas's project of establishing norms of communicative action. But the Kant revealed by Whitehead and Deleuze puts this project most radically into question, by problematizing the very idea of such norms. As Deleuze and Guattari put it, "Kant's *Critique of Judgement* is an unrestrained work of old age … [and in it] all the mind's faculties overcome their limits, the very limits that Kant had so carefully laid down in the works of his prime." (*Without Criteria* xv)

In many ways, the affective nature of aesthetic experience, generally construed, is exactly what makes this overcoming possible. "In an aesthetic judgment," writes Shaviro, echoing the above-discussed notion of anxiety through which an ex/change between being and beings is carried out, "I am not asserting anything about what is, nor … what ought to be. Rather, I am being lured, allured, seduced, repulsed, incited, or dissuaded. And … this is part of the process by which I *become* what I am" (4). As "singular, unrepeatable, and ungeneralizable," as "*exemplary*, as Kant suggests" and without being able to "provide an actual rule to be followed" (152), aesthetic experience is "a wider, and more fundamental, notion than Truth[23]" (Whitehead, qtd. in Shaviro 155). As such, aesthetic experience reminds us that the given "always exceeds our representation of it. Our thoughts and actions cannot shape the world all by themselves. Our mental processes or forms of representation are always limited, always compelled to confront their own limits" (Shaviro 49). This is precisely what we earlier described as plasticity through which forms of the discursive open up toward forms of the organic.

Aesthetic experience thus also shows us that time and space, "the inner and outer forms of intuition, are modes of feeling *before* they are conditions for understanding. This follows

[23] As Shaviro points out, for Whitehead, the aesthetic experience *par excellence* is Beauty. We will see how aesthetic experience and epistemological concerns further relate below.

from Kant's very definition of sensibility as 'the capacity (a receptivity) to acquire presentations as a result of the way we are affected by objects'" (Shaviro 56). The fact that the world of objects is *given*, that these objects are construed as *actual* rather than as *"*bare sense impressions" (57), and that these "objects *affect* us, prior to any knowledge of them on our part, or to any formal process of cause and effect" shows us that "the 'affective tone' … that suffuses every experience of perception both determines and exceeds cognition" (57).

The grotesque partakes in this aspect of aesthetic experience. Like aesthetics generally, it allows us to see that objects act upon us, marking causality as "partial and indirect" (Shaviro, *The Universe of Things* 145) – i.e. there is always more to a given object than the effect it has upon us/another object. Not only does this reveal causality as, as Shaviro argues, aesthetic, it also marks, in relation to the grotesque, the ex/change between beings and being in which Dasein recognizes its own non-thingness. The grotesque thus also preserves and modifies the Kantian function of aesthetic judgement, which for Kant presupposes "that the formal structures of empirical nature are well-adjusted to (even if not precisely designed for) the innate structures of our cognitive faculties" (Hanna). Rather than withdrawing the innate structures of our cognitive faculties from the objective realm of nature, the aesthetic – and, with its focus on the materiality of the human form, the grotesque – helps us to see how the kind of causality than runs from beings (objects) to being (subjectivity) is a part of the more general causality that accounts for "the ways that objects interact with, or affect, one another in the absence of a human (or animal) observer" (Shaviro, *The Universe* 141). As such – as a Symbolic instance of the general form of affectivity/causality evident in its smudging of the separation between the thing and its representation – the grotesque provides justification for the use of empirical induction. While it modifies/sublates the notion of phenomenal and noumenal realms and the system of judgments

elaborated by Kant, the grotesque preserves the Kantian function of aesthetics, that of deploying "a heuristic [experience-based] principle the adoption of which is involved in the procedure … of any scientific undertaking whatsoever" (Körner 179). It does so through a content-expression relationship – further discussed below and revealed by its status as the symbolic Real – between itself and this heuristic principle. In other words, as we will see below, time and its elaboration in the processes of the formation of subjectivity are a bridge the grotesque reveals between the realms of aesthetics and empirical science, doing so through the image of a de-formed or opened human form[24].

[24] For Kant, aesthetic contemplation of Beauty reveals to us the "principle of the harmony between nature and our mental capacities" (Körner 179). There are, for the purposes of our discussion, two important consequences of the notion that there is harmony between the human mind and nature. *First*, as "nature figuratively speaks to us in its beautiful forms" (Kant, *Judgment* 180) we are assured that "the beautiful is *the symbol of the morally good*" (227, emphasis added). As Kant argues, "[O]nly in this respect (that of a relation that is natural to everyone, and that is also *expected of everyone else as a duty* [i.e. as moral]) does it [the beautiful] please with a claim to the assent of everyone else, in which the mind is at the same time aware of a certain ennoblement and elevation above the mere receptivity for a pleasure from sensible impressions" (227, emphasis added). As partaking in both the phenomenal and noumenal realms, the human animal is here philosophically assured that its theoretical and moral truths are congruent with the state of the world it inhabits. As we will see below, this aspect of Kant's analysis of aesthetics is modified by the grotesque to, while dismissing the division between the noumenal and the phenomenal in favour of the tripartite model of the (material) Real, show the following: while the "straightjacket of *classical linguistic logic* forced us to acknowledge the strict falsity of even our best theories at every stage of human history," there is a way in which "that same epistemological modesty regarding truth" also shows us, "no less robustly, that our *conceptual maps of enduring reality* have improved dramatically in both their breadth and in their accuracy. Their serial imperfections and failures conceded, they have given us progressively better portrayals of the reality that embeds us, in all of the evaluatory dimensions germane to any map" (Churchland 215, emphasis added).

The *second* consequence of the notion that there is harmony between the human mind and nature, in light of the first consequence's modification, is preserved by the grotesque. In the Kantian system, the principle of harmony is "neither *theoretically* necessary as a condition of the experience of empirical fact … nor *practically* necessary as a condition of 'duty'" (Körner 179). Its necessity is, rather, "that of a heuristic

This human form, as I noted in the discussion of the works of Sarah Kane and Quentin Tarantino, exists within a thermodynamically closed, finite system within which work and force are exchanged (exerted by matter upon itself) but neither matter nor work is ever exchanged with a transcendental beyond. Within this finite system, then, bodies are opened up to the material world around them. We are now in a position to better qualify the ontologico-physical status of this material world as based on a particular functioning of dimensions of timespace, and as that which correlates with the symbolic Real status of the grotesque.

Following Kant's argument via Deleuze and Whitehead, Shaviro argues that "if time and space are the forms … of inner and outer intuition, then feeling is their common generative matrix. It is *by* the receptive act of feeling that I locate things in space and time" (59). The grotesque image and its accompanying conceptual and affective apparatus (most explicitly theorized as anxiety) slightly complicate this Kantian notion of timespace by supplementing it with the evocation of the external, physical timespace generated by a commitment to the

---

principle the adoption of which is involved in the procedure not of this or that particular scientific undertaking, but of any scientific undertaking whatsoever" (179). For Kant, the phenomenal realm of empirical truths *and* the noumenal realm of metaphysical truths and things-in-themselves are separated by an abyss not traversable by the human cognitive and perceptual apparatuses. Hence, Kant elaborates a kind of judgement he terms *reflective*, of which aesthetic judgement is one kind and which presupposes "that *we must believe* that the formal structures of empirical nature are well-adjusted to (even if not precisely designed for) the innate structures of our cognitive faculties" (Hanna, emphasis added). By giving truth to reflective judgement through concrete and particular judgements of taste about the beautiful, these judgements of taste also provide a justification for the use of empirical induction – they assure us that there is no "evil genius not less powerful than deceitful [who] has employed his whole energies in deceiving" us about the nature of the world (Descartes 49). As Stephan Körner writes: "The reasonableness of using inductive reasoning implies, of course, the reasonableness of the assumption that nature is fitted to our capacities of understanding; and to justify the former is *a fortiori* to justify the latter. However, even if for some reason or other we do not adopt induction as a policy of research we are still committed to assuming the principle of reflective Judgment: for by rejecting it we imply the futility of any research for a system of empirical laws" (179 – 80).

actuality of bodies. Shaviro follows Whitehead, noting that actual entities "are not primordially located in space and ordered by time. Rather, spatial location and temporal sequence are themselves generated through the becoming of these actual entities" (61). Conversely, the grotesque's fundamental trope – of opening the human body to the surrounding material world – complements timespace as form of intuition (as virtual) with timespace as a physical aspect of this world (as actual). *Actual timespace thus structures the plasticity of the grotesque*.

We have already broached this subject in our discussion of temporality and Lacanian subjectivity. On the level of aesthetic experience, this is accomplished via the grotesque's presupposition of the (human) brain as metamorphosing matter (organic plasticity), as a part of the actuality of the material world, and as a part of that world engaged in representing the world through forms of inner and outer intuition. We can describe this as an *Aufhebung* of the Kantian notion of cognition, beginning

> by expanding the [brain's] number of representational spaces, into the hundreds of thousands, far beyond the Kantian pair [of empirical intuition and rational judgement]. We locate them in discrete anatomical parts of the brain. We make each one of them plastic … in its semantic content and its conceptual organization. And we reach out to include motor cognition and practical skills, along with perceptual apprehension and theoretical judgment, as equal partners in our account of … knowledge. (Churchland 4)

The necessary supplement of this image of cognition is the role evolutionary biology plays in providing a motor for the living world and a functional image of how this world operates.

Before I further elaborate on this, allow me to briefly illustrate what I have been talking about by looking at how Samuel Delany locates bodies within the timespace of his novels. This will provide us with an example of how timespace structures the plasticity of the grotesque. As I

already noted, *The Mad Man* employs realism substantially in its elaboration of a pornotopia. John Marr's subjectivity is thus closely explored through his fantasies and self-objectification in various sexual scenarios. Abandoning the plan to write a study of the philosopher Timothy Hasler as "a 500-page tome on psychology, history, reality, and metaphysics, putting them once and for all into their grandly ordered relation" (8), Marr immerses himself into "emotional and physical 'mesiness'" that constitutes lived experience (Davis 179). Following hints given to him by fragments of Hasler's biography, Marr unknowingly replicates Hasler's experiences, often in uncanny detail. In this way, he gives substance to the concept of "Hasler structures" built on the notion that "large-scale, messy, informal systems are necessary in order to develop, on top of them, precise, hard-edged, tractable systems. … [T]he messy is what provides the energy which holds any system within it coherent and stable" (215). *The Mad Man*, the pornographic novel that embraces this messiness thus takes place of Marr's planned dissertation.

The realization of Hasler structures emerges as a conclusion to a life lived twice, as Marr retroactively reveals Hasler's biography through his own sexual experiences. In many ways Hasler is (structurally) Marr, and Marr is Hasler. As such, these two illustrate "the temporality of a circular time in which 'time stops' when, in a convoluted self-relating, the subject posits its own presupposed cause" (Žižek, *Less Than Nothing* 618). This relation between Marr and Hasler illustrates the plasticity of 'messiness' and structure, the way they receive and give form. This is explicitly illustrated in Marr's attendance at the Mine Shaft's wet night, a gay bar that actually existed "in the heart of … [New York's] meatpacking district" from 1977 to 1985 (Wood). Here, Marr learns that albeit "there's a place for everything … you still have to follow the rules" (*The Mad Man* 109). Similarly, the radically free sexual activity of John Marr and Mad Man Mike's homeless posse is minimally regulated by an exchange of a single penny with

which one person temporarily and consensually buys another. Marr learns the function of this purchase in a set of notes left by Hasler "that read like … the first draft … of this [Marr's/ Delany's] book." Hasler writes:

> [Mad Man Mike] says owning something isn't bad. He wishes somebody owned him. I pointed out to him in a country as historically entailed with slavery as the United States, that was a rather dangerous position for a Negro to adhere to. He says, rather insightfully, that his whole life he's been treated like one form of pervert or another. And (to use his own … words), "There ain't a whole lot of difference for most people between a pervert like me and a nigger pervert like me." Then he went on to explain, rather fancifully, that … nobody should ever pay more than a penny for another human being. He said that knowing somebody wanted you enough to pay a penny for you meant you were not in an unenviable position of most people he knew living in the parks and the streets: i.e., no one … wanted them at *all* – to most people they were worth nothing! (404 – 405)

Mad Man Mike's logic describes how the symbolic act of paying can be weaved into operations of desire and human connection: the way it can structure them and make them appear from within the chaos of physical, sexual, and emotional contact. It also highlights the way these structures immediately and fundamentally objectify a person, thereby opening a space for a creation of consensual communities and subjectivities related to it, while the uncanny echoes between Hasler's and Marr's books and lives reveal the temporal relation between the two.

By positing Hasler as his own presupposed cause, Marr illustrates the transcendentally ideal form of temporality, which is activated in the construction of subjectivity. This is the 'fantastic' or virtual aspect of temporality in *The Mad Man*. At the same time, it is important to

note that this self-relating is accomplished via various physical sexual acts that make up the text's pornotopia. Here "subject and object are [shown to be] correlative" as the subject emerges in and out of the physical acts making up linear causality of reality (Žižek, *Less Than Nothing* 618). "With men I've sucked off repeatedly," narrates Marr, "I enjoy keeping track of what they like. … Half that knowledge, you can't really talk about. It's something your body – your head, your tongue, your arms, your neck – knows" (282 – 283). He continues: "Lots of cocksuckers, they're always sucking some fantasy dick. But what I'm into is making the real dick on the real man I'm really sucking feel real good – as that man defines good" (283). What's important to note here is that "what's good" isn't communicated in language, but through praxis. The subject is here made a correlative of the object, emerging out of physical chains of causality: if my body moves this way, yours moves that way. Transcendentally ideal and empirically real temporality here appears as a consequence of the subject/object being inserted into the physical chain of causality where time as materially real reigns: there are no Hasler and Marr before the various echoing and overlapping bodily and sexual practices. This "leaves you kind of raw and unshielded to the world," Marr concludes, highlighting the abject aspects of this process, "so that it's more comfortable thinking of yourself as a 'you' than an 'I'" (361).

The Return to Nevèrÿon is a series of tales about signs and signification. As such, it is principally concerned with the way we make meaning through discourse and with how various discourses develop, conflict, and change in relation to socio-political and material practices of a metamorphosing culture. As I noted earlier, these tales' engagement with time is typical of the sword and sorcery genre: the development of writing systems, weaving, and of an urban/ democratic economy from a feudal/rural one hence deeply implicate our world not through chronology and history but through recognizable conceptual and discursive structures. This is

evident not just through the tales' narrative voice which "shares our point of view rather than that of the characters" (Spencer 72) but also through the tales' "disconcerting mix of gritty realism and the most blatant improbabilities and anachronisms imaginable" (71). Much of the Nevèrÿon tales is therefore focused on the way humans make meaning through discursive systems. Raven, a warrior from a matriarchal clan in which our, patriarchal system is reversed as in a mirror image, or Gorgik, mentioned above as someone whose history as a slave and fight against slavery are deeply connected to his sexual desire, are good examples of this tendency.

The most radical consideration of signification, reality, and temporality emerges in "The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals." In it, Delany juxtaposes scenes in 1980s New York with scenes in Nevèrÿon, paralleling the outbreak of AIDS with an outbreak of a mysterious plague. He thus classifies this tale as a document, noting that the use of this term "should probably be read as a gesture to … inadequacy" of documents to capture "changing reality" ("Sword & Sorcery" 157). Yet, at the same time, he notes, "as much as it irks [him]," this term "*must* be read in the other way," as capturing the form of ever-shifting reality (158). Delany continues:

> [T]he changing reality of AIDS has made embarrassingly clear … the way in which through the economy of the mutual tripartite inadequation of desire/language/experience realities must always shift. … The discrepancy between what we desire … and what happens contours the space in which language repeatedly … occurs. The discrepancy between what we say and what happens is the endlessly repeated locus of desire. And the discrepancy between what we desire and what we say revises … the space of what happens *to* what happens (our experience *of* our experience…) (158).

Temporal dislocations of "The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals" are an attempt to depict not *the Truth* of reality but the truth of *the form* of reality, made up of inadequation of these three parts.

Language, in other words, is incapable of adequately representing desire as well as what happens because the way they affect one another is always partial and indirect. It should not then be surprising that the actuality of S&M practices – as an intersection of desire and what happens – becomes explicitly visible only in the third collection of Nevèrÿon tales in which "Plagues and Carnivals" appears, as tales start to focus on a search for language that reflects the reality of AIDS and its inextricable link with sexual practices. "[W]hat I hope at least part of my work performs," Delany writes, "is a necessary deformation of an older pre-AIDS discourse, which privileged sexual reticence, into a discourse that foregrounds detailed sexual honesty, imagination, and articulation" ("Thomas L. Long Interview" 123). Nor should it be surprising that the image of "some monster god who roamed our borders" appears so prominently in this tale; a monster god who must remain unnamed, for "had I called it to me by its proper appellation as it stalked the forest night, hearing me it simply would have devoured me in its immense, rotten mouth" ("Plagues and Carnivals" 313). AIDS and nameless monstrosity are here made equivalent as signifiers of plasticity (again, à la the Lacanian *phallus*) that mark the actuality of desire and what happens, represented here as in *The Mad Man* by various sexual practices and by excessive/monstrous (human) bodies.

Now, *The Mad Man*'s grotesque creature is associated with an overwhelmingly positive representation of desire and what happens, ultimately embodied by the loving relationship between Marr and Leaky. (Delany also raises certain dangers, such as AIDS, and ambiguities in the elaboration of this grotesquerie, which I will discuss below.) Conversely, the monstrosity represented in "Plagues and Carnivals" emerges amid the story's "echoes of [AIDS-panic induced] contemporary urban cleansing," reflected in the ostracism of those who become ill and in the stories of murders of a number of homeless persons embedded in the tale's contemporary

narrative (Floyd, "How to Subsume Difference" 117). This monster is described most directly during a scene of a "reactionary" gathering meant to "confront the contagion" by attempting to police desire via "a ritual appeal to Amnewor, the god of 'edges, borders, and boundaries'" (117 – 118). Taking place in a grotto underneath the city during a Carnival organized for the benefit and as a distraction of the people by the ruling class, this ritual *names* and summons Amnewor as a "she" who "prowl[s] and linger[s] along [Nevèrÿon's] rim" (332). Delany thus, in the act of naming and assigning value, brings into proximity the fear of contagion with the fear of abject femininity that has historically been aligned with the use of the grotesque.

"[R]eeking and putrid" (332), Amnewor is raised "through the medium of [a] desiccated corpse" (329) and appears as "suppurating and pulsing meat" that eats human eyes, tongues, and "the hot jelly of human brains" (330). She is, furthermore, sexualized so as to negatively reflect the *jouissance* of *The Mad Man* in her "vast flesh slimed with oceanic slough and filth," as "her many mouths erupt in the loose, liquescent skin, some so small you could not push one finger into their tiny, sucking slits, some so huge and slobbering that the tongue within is sliced to bloody strips by broken teeth … while others are all soft cheek and uvula and lip – spitting, hissing, sucking" and "dangling in immense and flaccid flaps, fluttering and flatulent wit the fetid airs, rumbling out here, gushing in there" (330). Along with the contemporary Symbolic realm's fear of abject femininity, this ceremony and its monster also point to how this Symbolic used and continues to use AIDS to link up the other of masculinity (women) with the figure of the homosexual: "First you tell me," notes one of the ministers of Neveryóna, the urban capital of Nevèrÿon,

> that of the hundred-thirty-seven persons who have so far been reported to have the disease, *all* are male…? Then you cast your eyes down, become nervous, and tell me,

> well, they are not *all* male…? … Should I assume, then, that this is a way of saying that those men with the disease are men who, in the eyes of many, might be considered *less* than male…? If that is the case, then it is a truly astonishing illness. (210 – 211)

This type of metaphorical thinking is why Delany repeatedly calls for "a better metaphor" for (the actuality of) AIDS: our job is to "elaborate [this metaphor] well enough to help stabilize those thoughts, images, or patterns that, i*n the long run*, are useful … to those with the disease, to those who care for them, or even those who only know about them" (187).

Delany notes that, because its language is always profoundly dialogic, "narrative fiction … [cannot] propose the *radically* successful metaphor" ("Plagues and Carnivals" 348); yet, he adds, such a goal is possible in acts of interpretation. These kinds of observations embedded in the tale, together with its foregrounding of the writing process – Delany interposes comments like "Expand this scene to some six/eight pp." (346) throughout the tale – and its juxtaposition of fantastic and 'real,' or autobiographical temporal frames, signal the text's desire to bring language and what happens close together by stressing the differences and similarities between fantasy and autobiographical writing. This impulse of the text indexes that "which we totter on the edge of naming and speaking" (Scott, "Delany's Divinities" 717) as what exists on the edge of discourse as other than discourse. "Namelessness and its powers," continues Scott, writing of Delany's nameless gods, "instantiate[ ] an unspeakable 'Real,' … figured [in Delany's fiction] in monstrosity as well as divinity" (719). This Real is, in our context, the materiality of bodies and their embededness in the actual form of temporality. The difficulty of representing these bodies as Real and in discourse evokes images difficult to confront: grotesque bodies, monsters, monstrous gods, and explicit depictions of sexual practices. Representations of monstrosity work here together with the juxtaposition of temporal frames in order to bring to our attention the

organic plasticity of desire and what happens outside and inside texts, as well as language's inability to represent them adequately.

Let us now return to our elaboration of the grotesque as symbolic Real and temporality. The physical, plastic structure of the brain (as elaborated in the above-quoted *Plato's Camera* by Paul Churchland, or in the work of Thomas Metzinger) generates the quasi-Kantian timespace of inner and outer intuition as time moves into the subject, distinguishing the Ego from the I, so that our interiority divides us from ourselves. This is a result of the fact that, epistemologically speaking, "[f]or physical individuals, absolute instantaneousness … presents an impossibility" (Metzinger, *Being No One* 25): as "all physically realized processes of information conduction and processing take time … the information available in the nervous system in a certain, very radical sense never is *actual* information" (25). Mental representation is thus "a process, whose function" for biological (human and non-human) "system[s] consists in representing actual physical reality within a certain, narrowly defined temporal framework and with a sufficient degree of functionally adequate precision. In short, no such thing as absolute actuality exists on the level of real-world information flow in the brain" (26). As mental representations are *de facto* representations – i.e. they participate in an elaboration of a type of map, a "hierarchically structured, high dimensional activation space" within the physical structure of the brain (Churchland 32) which is "plastic and shifting … under the pressures of experience" (37) and which is in search of a "systematic and objective grip" on the actuality of the physical world within the context of our environment (61) – because of this, Nietzsche's epistemological point about human knowledge and Truth is valid. Truth is, indeed, a "mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms," and a set of "illusions of which we have forgotten that they are illusions" ("On Truth and Lying" 768). But we must add two important caveats: a) in the

context of thinking through plasticity via grotesque as symbolic Real, this epistemological critique is, so to speak, immaterial – it misses its target; and b) it is precisely from this epistemological gap that one of the two dimensions of the grotesque's status as the symbolic Real emerges (the other being the actuality of physical timespace; these two are related as two 'sides' of a Möbius strip).

To elaborate: as a physically realized (embodied) processor of information, the conscious brain is only ever able to construct "mental representata" (Metzinger, *Being No One* 29) as virtual, within the timespace of inner and outer intuition. "In this sense," notes Metzinger, "the content of consciously experienced mental representata is temporally [and spatially] internal content, not in a strictly physical, but only in a functional sense" (29). In other words, the here and the now of any conscious moment are always experienced "within a window of presence that has been functionally developed by the system [the brain] itself" (29). Most importantly, this timespace of inner and outer intuition is "constituted by the physical boundaries of the individual organism," the body intact, so that "what the system consciously experiences locally *supervenes on its physical properties* with nomological necessity" (29 – 30, emphasis added). Functionally, then, the experiences of presence, of being right here right now experiencing this, are dependent with nomological necessity[25] upon being an "embodied experiential subject" (Metzinger 295).

[25] Nomological necessity is the necessity associated with laws of nature. OED defines the adjective as "Relating to, concerned with, or designating laws, esp. (*Philos*) ones which are not logical necessities." In its entry on "Supervenience," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* notes: "supervenience relations can hold with either metaphysical or nomological necessity, and perhaps even with some other kind of necessity. … One important example is the supervenience of the mental on the physical. Just about everyone, even a Cartesian dualist, believes some version of this supervenience claim. But there is vigorous disagreement about whether the supervenience relation holds with metaphysical or merely nomological necessity. Ask yourself – could there be an individual that has no conscious experience at all, despite being physically indiscernible from an individual that is conscious…? That is, could there be what philosophers call a 'zombie'? Because it is widely

Approximating Lacan's Mirror Stage, this functionally normal state of consciousness "leads to the phenomenal quality of *self-certainty*, of intuitively relying on the coherence, the presence, and the stability of elementary bioregulatory processes and the body in general" (295). This is the making of the subject of the utterance as Imaginary-Symbolic via internal timespace.

Somewhat paradoxically, this functional/virtual model of consciousness – as constituted by the physical boundaries of the organism and concerned with optimal performance within its evolutionary context – is at the same time what allows this organism to function as actual, as "fully integrated into the causal network constituting the physical world" (Metzinger 294). This, again, registers the ex/change between being and beings, as well as the above-described non-anthropocentric affective causality rooted in aesthetics. "On this level," Metzinger notes, "mind is anchored in life, self-representation is better described as self-*regulation*, and it is much more fruitful to speak of functional self-preservation or of physical self-organization than of mental self-representation" (294). This functional model of the self, constituted by the physical boundaries of the organism and concerned with self-preservation is entirely normative: it is the body intact that always doubles the de-formed grotesque body. It is, furthermore, the index of temporality as materially real, and thus one aspect of the subject of enunciation, the aspect which involves "a bodily component" introduced through "breathing and all of the movements of the jaw, tongue, and so on" (Fink, *Lacan to the Letter* 144) not just in speech, but also more

---

agreed that the mental nomologically supervenes on the physical, it is widely agreed that zombies are nomologically impossible – that their existence would violate psychophysical laws. But some philosophers … think that zombies are metaphysically possible. This remains a matter of lively dispute, and resolving it requires addressing some hard questions about the relationship between conceivability and metaphysical possibility. Suffice it to note that the dispute is precisely over the modal force of the 'cannot' in 'there cannot be a mental difference without a physical difference'" (McLaughlin and Bennett).

generally in non-conscious processes that regulate the state of the organism through breathing, heart rate, temperature, cocksucking.

So while, epistemologically speaking, "the subjective experience of certainty [referred to above] … is unjustified" (Metzinger, *Being No One* 295), it is precisely this epistemological gap between a thing's actuality and its virtuality that allows the conscious body to function so effectively. The fact that the brain is "self-representationally blind" – that "self-presentational content [of the 'actual' *as* actual] is safely anchored in a medium which never interferes with the generation of this content," as "it can never become the intentional object of the presentational dynamic it generates" (294) – is what allows the organism to function as an organism. (This, as should be obvious, is an analogue of grotesque's 'trick of art' through which anxiety is evoked as a result of smudging the distance between the abject thing and its representation.) If its physical processes, which give rise to what Metzinger terms *naïve realism*[26], were to become directly accessible to the organism's consciousness, this organism would become simply unable to process the complexity of the information presented[27]. "Phenomenal selfhood," then, as an

[26] Naïve realism is the belief that (human) consciousness has a direct, unobstructed view of the actual. It is described by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations*: "Look at the blue of the sky and say to yourself 'How blue the sky is!' – When you do it spontaneously – without philosophical intentions – the idea never crosses your mind that this impression of colour belongs only *to you.* And you have no hesitation in exclaiming that to someone else. And if you point at anything as you say the words you point at the sky. I am saying: you have not the feeling of pointing-into-yourself, which often accompanies 'naming the sensation' when one is thinking about 'private language.' Nor do you think that really you ought not to point to the colour with your hand, but with your attention. (Consider what it means 'to point to something with the attention')" (96).

[27] Churchland, for example, notes that there are "many *hundreds*, perhaps even *thousands*, of internal cognitive 'spaces,' each of which provides a proprietary canvas on which some aspect of human cognition is continually unfolding" (2). Human brain's 10^{14} synaptic connections, furthermore, participate in multiple levels of

evolutionary optimal strategy of being-in-the-world, "results from autoepistemic closure in a self-representing system; it is a lack of information" that makes "an overwhelming amount of information" available to the system, even if it *fails* to generate truth and falsity as a possibility of epistemological certainty (Metzinger 337).

This failure/gap is what activates the grotesque as the symbolic Real. As Metzinger argues, subjectivity of an organism generated by the nervous system (in our context, the brain as organic plasticity) is never anything more than an optimal representational strategy designed to deal with the complexity of external and internal stimuli within the context of a life in a particular environment. Matter represents itself as more than matter, but this transcendental or virtual representation is always only a projection of the brain, and an activation of it via the symbolic Real (i.e. it is the subject of the utterance). Unlike the "unknown knowns" of the real Real of which Žižek writes, this symbolic Real is here a kind of "known unknown," not in a sense that we know that we don't know the truth of consciousness, but in a sense that even when we know it – we *cannot* really know it. There is no way for the nervous system, for the brain, truly to embody the knowledge of itself as matter, yet this is exactly what the grotesque as the symbolic Real reveals. All we really are is "dynamical self-organization in the brain" (Metzinger, *The Ego Tunnel* 122), dynamical self-organization of matter, and even though this "may well be cognitively available to us (because we may have a correct theory or concept of it), … it is not attentionally or introspectively available, simply because on the level of subjective experience, we have no point of reference 'outside' the [representational] tunnel. Whatever appears to us – however it is mediated – appears as reality" (Metzinger, *The Ego Tunnel* 44 – 45).

---

learning, some of which happens over longer periods of time (e.g. development of a child's brain over years), while some happens "in the region of milliseconds to hours (33 – 34).

As "something that is known" but "not something *one* knows," and as something that "does not take itself as an object" (109), this dynamic registers the existence of the subject of enunciation whose character as plasticity itself is here revealed as the symbolic Real. Even though non-conscious processes should not be confused with unconscious ones, it is the plasticity of the brain as exhibited through non-conscious processes that must be seen as allowing for the unconscious to function. It is from this perspective that we can make sense of the duality of the subject of enunciation as always discursively receding (in the transcendentally ideal and empirically real temporal dimension) while, at the same time, registering organic plasticity of the brain (in the materially real temporal dimension).

This dynamic also necessarily blurs the distinction between knowledge and belief, showing us how logical categories and modalities Kant had employed fail to live up to the complexity of the biological processes which go into composing the functional and actual images of human knowledge and the human brain. It also shows us why, in our context, Nietzsche's critique misses the mark: it is precisely our metaphoric or metonymic knowledge of 'Truth' as lived that allows us to form increasingly sophisticated theories about the real world to which we have only limited epistemological access[28]. The impossibility of immediate identification with the 'Truth' of organic plasticity[29] activates the first dimension of the grotesque as the symbolic Real whereby the timespace of inner and outer forms of intuition is seen to be a virtual or transcendental index – a kind of symbol – of thinking through matter. Aesthetic knowledge here lets us glimpse something that logical and epistemological categories fail to reveal on their own.

[28] This, of course, marks the content-expression relationship between the grotesque and the inductive method of science.

[29] Metzinger, however, does note that lucid dreams, meditation, and certain drug-induced states indicate a possibility of striving toward a fuller immediate knowledge of these physical processes.

The second dimension of the grotesque as the symbolic Real, closely and dynamically interwoven with the first, is activated by the image of the opening up of the body to its material surroundings. As I have argued, the functional model of consciousness as constituted by the physical boundaries of the individual organism also allows us to see the body as actual, as integrated into the causal network constituting the physical world. As such, this body must be seen as embedded in physical timespace, for two complementary reasons: on the one hand, as "the *only* perceptual object that is constantly given" to consciousness, the physical body is "phenomenologically as well as functionally, the most important *source of invariance* human beings possess" (Metzinger, *Being No One* 289). The actuality of the body is thus precisely the combination of the phenomenological and the functional; and it, with nomological necessity, "anchors us in reality – physically and functionally, as well as phenomenally" (544). On the other hand, it is only through "represent[ing] itself as being *directed* toward an [external] object" that "inwardness appears" (*The Ego Tunnel* 103). In other words, the very actuality of phenomenal experience necessitates (not logically, of course) the actuality of bodies: "[T]he availability of the body as a whole for focal attention is enough to create the most fundamental sense of selfhood-as-inwardness" (104).

The image of the body opening up to the external material reality in the grotesque aesthetic mode therefore evokes the existence of physical timespace within which bodies exist and toward which the virtual timespace of forms of intuition opens. This conceptualization is shored up by the way time functions in relation to the subject of enunciation, whose "usurping" by the signifier/symptom from the point of view of the Symbolic is the obverse side of time as materially real and registered by the plasticity of the organism/brain (the two can here be said to form the Möbius Strip often invoked by Lacan). Despite the fact that, to the conscious mind, the

relationship between these two kinds of timespace presents itself as another instance of the content-expression relation, in actuality the elaboration of the human body as plasticity images *the supervenience of thought upon the body*. The physical timespace is primary or *ancestral*[30].

The grotesque evokes this actuality of timespace as a "metaphysical irreducible … provided [for ontology] by physics" (Maudlin, *Metaphysics* 104). As such, the spacetime of modern physics – mathematically expressed as "variably curved, according to the distribution of mass and energy" (DiSalle) and as evoked by organic plasticity of the brain – is precisely the second aspect of the grotesque as the symbolic Real. And while the physical characteristics of this spacetime are beyond the scope of this discussion, two facts remain: both the virtual timespace of forms of intuition and the actual, physical timespace are evoked by the grotesque as elaborated above, *and* the actual timespace is primary, in a dual sense. One, as thought is supervenient on the body, physical timespace is primary with nomological necessity over the virtual timespace of forms of intuition. And two, as nomologically necessary, this physical timespace is activated within the realm of theory or philosophy as an axiomatic index of the

[30] The grotesque aesthetic mode suggests, in this context, certain basic aspects of timespace as generally elaborated by twentieth century physics: a) the grotesque's constant conjunction of space and time in its manipulation of the two suggests Herman Minkwoski's 1908 observation that "space by itself, and time by itself, are doomed to fade away into mere shadows, and only a kind of union of the two will preserve an independent reality" (qtd. in Penrose 406); b) the focus on the materiality of bodies as an expression of timespace echoes Einstein's conclusion that "spacetime is curved," and that this curvature is "*determined by the distribution of mass*" (DiSalle); and c) grotesque manipulations of timespace suggest that the notion of absolute time must be abandoned (Penrose 405). What is to be stressed, rather, is that "the variable curvature of spacetime makes the imposition of a global inertial frame impossible" (DiSalle). While these "curvatures" and "disorientations" of spacetime are, within the context of the theory of relativity, conceived as mathematical, grotesque conceives them as ontological: as deformations and openings of physical bodies. In this sense, the suggestion/echo between conceptualizations of the physical spacetime and the grotesque are allegorical rather than structural.

symbolic Real, "posited as … given and as *already determining its own positing*" (Brassier, "Axiomatic Heresy" 28). It is not "presupposed as given through a transcendent act of decision, but axiomatically posited as already given, independently of every perceptual or intentional presupposition, as well as every gesture of ontological or phenomenological position" (28).

This timespace is also revealed through its role in Lacanian conceptualization of subjectivity, where it exists as 'one side' of the Möbius Strip that is the symbolic Real dimension of the subject of enunciation. Even so, the internal spacetime as an aspect of the grotesque as the symbolic Real must be sought via a phenomenological investigation of the conscious mind, and as such it is entirely dependent on ontological/phenomenological position. Alternately, the physical spacetime is axiomatically posited. Even within the context of a discussion of the grotesque as the symbolic Real, the external spacetime is always already given and already determining its own positing: it is *ancestral*, in Meillassoux's sense, as a spacetime within which "spatio-temporal givenness itself came into being" (Meillassoux 22).

This actual timespace is, then, given to ontology by physics and, in our context, it provides the second aspect of the grotesque as the symbolic Real: it is given neither through a transcendent act of decision[31] nor through a perceptual or intentional presupposition. Rather, it is

[31] Laruelle describes most philosophy as *decisional*, as "minimally consist[ing] in an act of scission or separation dividing two terms: a conditioned (but not necessarily perceptual or empirical) datum and its condition as an *a priori* (but not necessarily rational) faktum, both of which are *posited as given* in and through a synthetic unity wherein conditioned, datum and faktum, are conjoined. Thus the philosopher posits a structure of articulation which immediately binds and distinguishes the conditioned datum – that which is given – whether it be perceptual, phenomenological, linguistic, social or historical, and its condition – its givenness – as an *a priori* faktum through which the datum is given: … [e.g.] sensibility, subjectivity, language, society, history. … This fractional loop, this auto-positional and auto-donational structure, constitutes philosophy's inherently reflexive or specular character. … Philosophizing the world becomes a pretext for philosophy's own interminable self-interpretation" (Brassier, "Axiomatic Heresy" 26).

given as the symbolic Real: a mathematical formula which expresses the actuality of physical timespace via "pure signifiers" that "we cannot make any sense out of … [through] our experience" (Žižek, *Reality of the Virtual*). Like the functioning of the plasticity of the brain, it is a known unknown. In other words, the only timespace we have direct access to is the Kantian, epistemologically dubious, timespace of forms of intuition, while the physical timespace must remain conceptual. It is as mathematically consistent and experimentally verified, then, that physical spacetime enters the realm of theory as the symbolic Real. And it is the dynamic of the grotesque aesthetic mode that reveals it, for us, within this space of theory. This is also the method by which the grotesque as an aesthetic mode creates a content-expression relation between itself and the heuristic principle of justification of induction: it draws in and activates this mathematical structure of timespace, along with the timespace of forms of intuition, within its methods of representation, doing so via an elaboration of (discursive and organic) plasticity. By activating the nature of timespace as the symbolic Real, it utilises natural science's inductive method as its conceptual background, thereby forming a content-expression relationship with it.

Despite invoking the normative notion of the body intact and the physical timespace as actual, the grotesque also preserves the minimal amount of epistemological uncertainty via its dedication to the biological-evolutionary functional model of internal spacetime, as well as, more importantly, a dynamic model of the actuality of timespace in which "there is an infinity of planes of simultaneity passing through any given spacetime point" so that "no physical test can distinguish one from amongst the lot. … Assuming that we humans are complex physical systems, then we have no way to distinguish *the* present from amongst the multitude of presents" (Savitt). In other words, by showing us how the internal and external spacetimes fold into one another, the grotesque shows our, contemporary, world to be *nomadic*, in a sense that despite the

fact that, even today, "we all remain Leibnizian because what always matters is folding, unfolding, [and] refolding" (Deleuze, *The Fold* 137), the Leibnizian monad has, in the contemporary moment, metamorphosed: it has become "in tune with divergent series that belong to incompossible monads" and to incompossible worlds – something that the Baroque world explicitly precluded. "[I]t could be said," Deleuze infers, "that the monad, astraddle over several worlds [or presents], is kept half open as if by a pair of pliers" (137). *Nomadology*, he further claims, with its fundamentally open, connective, rhizomatic character has replaced Leibnizian *monadology* in which the subject echoes and harmonizes with the best possible world by being, as it were, closed or folded in – separate but compossible with this world – and by excluding all the worlds incompossible with it.

A brief but relevant note: an important consequence of the grotesque's status as the symbolic Real is that it reveals language for what it is: not at all the limit of my world (or a limit of my world in a very circumscribed sense), but only "a limited tool" and "an empirical part of the world to which it refers, rather than a transcendental condition of that world. And there are other ways, besides the linguistic one, of prehending the world, or more precisely entities in the world" (Shaviro, *Without Criteria* 151). What this means is that, of course, reality as actual is underdetermined: "The sum total of environmentally induced sensory activity, over the entire human race and over as many centuries as you care to consider, is very unlikely to produce a uniquely inevitable set of conceptual resources with which we are fated to comprehend reality" (Churchland 248). Yet as Churchland points out this is no reason for sceptical disappointment[32]. Language is one of a number of tools that participate in creating a functionally adequate and progressively more sophisticated and correct mapping of the actual. The more expansive, ethical

[32] See Churchland 248 – 250.

consequence of the grotesque's status as the symbolic Real is that – rather than locating in language an exclusively human characteristic via which we can initiate the correlationist project that denies the possibility of considering the realms of subjectivity and objectivity independently of one another – grotesque's status as the symbolic Real presents consciousness itself as gradational (present in different degrees in different species), as well as an evolutionary adaptation to a general biological problem of survival.

The Real Real Grotesques

The real Real, as I noted earlier, is the very core of the Real and Žižek approaches it on two levels. The first level is "relatively close to the Symbolic order" in that it is composed by "all that accompanies the Symbolic level as its obscene shadow[33]" and as a "shadowy virtual reality of affects which has to accompany the official discourse" (*The Reality of the Virtual*). Žižek elaborates on the second level via a reading of *The Sound of Music* (1965), arguing that the virtual (narrative) reality of the film shows the way in which the visual narrative directly contradicts its official (surface) narrative in that the struggle between the honest Austrians and the evil Nazis is shadowed by a visual representation of the honest Austrians as the Aryan ideals of Nazism, while the Nazis themselves are represented as "decadent Jewish cosmopolitan" bureaucrats (*The Reality of the Virtual*). More concisely, as noted above, the real Real is "an abstract form which structures the disposition of actually existing elements around it" and the "mysterious *je ne sais quoi*, the unfathomable 'something' on account of which the sublime dimension shines through an ordinary object" (*Organs without Bodies* 103). Another way of conceiving this aspect of the real Real is to think back to Delany's notion of messiness which

[33] As an example, Žižek names the obscene marching chants that accompany the military Symbolic order: "Meaningless rhymes combined with sadistic or sexually perverse obscenities."

energizes and holds together any structure, represented in *The Mad Man* through the image of the monstrous body which opens the novel and through scenes of abject sexual practices; or, how the monstrous body of the Amnewor is structured through a fear of abject femininity and its metaphorical links with the body of the homosexual.

Paradoxically, as Žižek's definitions and Delany's examples show, thought can begin to grasp this level only through metaphoric thinking (where the real Real links to the imaginary Real) and through various forms of abstractions (where it links to the symbolic Real). The real Real is, then, where the act of abstract, (dia)logical thinking returns from and within the very heart of the material. We can describe this as a kind of immanent, dialogic form of thinking through the body – as body of thought/bodies' thought which functions only in relation to the Real's tripartite structure that always maintains links with the body and the material, as discussed in relation to the imaginary and symbolic modes of the Real.

There are, fittingly, two ways in which the discussion of the grotesque as the symbolic Real in the previous section activates this unfathomable something. On a conceptual level, the elaboration of bodies as actual and of the external timespace as ancestral activates the *modality of necessity of contingency* (Meillassoux), which acts in grotesque representations as *the formal support for the physical actuality of bodies and timespace* – as that abstract form that structures the arrangement of actual elements around it. This (dia)logical modality also lies at the centre of the concept of plasticity, which we have seen operating in the previous two modalities of the Real. On a more general level, within the context of modern Western philosophy and theory, it is the role Immanuel Kant plays within it that reveals the obscene shadow accompanying the Symbolic/official discourse most commonly labelled as postmodernity.

Let us start with the more straightforward of the two levels: the role of Immanuel Kant in contemporary theory. In my discussion of the London narratives of Ackroyd, Moore, and Sinclair, I noted how – as Adorno and Horkheimer argue – unrestrained Enlightenment rationality can become a kind of "irrationality of reason" (48), which is "totalitarian" (4) and stands "in the same relationship to things as the dictator to human beings" (6)[34]. Horkheimer and Adorno link this unrestrained, particularly Kantian, rationality to the rise of fascism, arguing that Kant's moral law, as elaborated via the categorical imperative, "has no support within the [rational project of] the *Critique*" (67). Rather, "Enlightenment expels difference from theory" (67) as it considers "human actions and desires exactly as if [it] were dealing with lines, planes, and bodies" (Spinoza, qtd. in Horkheimer and Adorno 67):

> Freed from the supervision by one's own class, which had obliged the nineteenth-century businessman to maintain Kantian respect and reciprocal love, fascism … relieves its people of the burden of moral feeling. … Contrary to the categorical imperative, and all the more deeply in accord with pure reason, it treats human beings as things, centers of modes of behaviour. (67)

Writing from a starkly different intellectual position within contemporary Western theory[35] Nick Land similarly, if somewhat more reductively, notes that while in the Kantian system

---

[34] "In the service of an advancing rationalization of instrumental thought modeled on the domination of nature and serving its purposes," Adorno and Horkheimer note, "enlightened reason is progressively hollowed out until it reverts to the new mythology of a resurrected relationship to nature, to violence" (218). By subjecting everything to reason, "making the same" everything that "might be different," by instituting the principle of exchange through which all things can be made equivalent, the rational subject enacts "one of the primal images of mythical violence: [he] amputates the incommensurable" (8 – 9).

[35] Horkheimer and Adorno are cultural theorists whose work "presupposes a critical social theory indebted to Karl Marx" and they read "Marx as a Hegelian materialist whose critique of capitalism unavoidably includes a

"theoretical knowledge is open to a limited negotiation with alterity, practical or moral certainty is forbidden from entering into relation with anything outside itself, except to issue commands. Kant's practical subject already prefigures a dear führer, barking impossible orders that seem to come from another world" ("Kant" 74).

Both Horkheimer and Adorno and Land condemn Kantian rationality for negating difference and prefiguring the violence of fascism. Along similar lines, in his "Economimesis," Derrida argues that Kant's rationalistic conceptualisation of aesthetics and nature "functions in the service of that onto-theological humanism, of that obscurantism of the economy one could call liberal in its era of *Aufklärung*" (6). A "concept of economy acquired from digestion," argues Derrida, "governs the view of the beautiful in Kantian aesthetics. While the beautiful is a name for the balanced and harmonious metabolism, the closed economy remains threatened from within by disgust, and this analytic of the beautiful falls apart when it reaches the point of disgust and vomiting – a point at which the economy reaches its limit in terms of what is … inassimilable" (Birnbaum and Olsson). These responses to Kant are representative of what is generally termed postmodern theory in that they condemn what is seen as Reason's erasure of difference – an attempt to impose a universal order by manufacturing essential Truths, be their Rational-theoretical or Rational-moral.

In different ways, these postmodern texts strive for an elaboration of plurality and difference, of that which is in excess of the limits of Kantian Reason. Land, for example, writes

---

critique of the ideologies that capitalism sustains and requires" (Zuidervaart). Nick Land is fundamentally a Deleuzean thinker whose "writings inhabit a disordered anarchitecture, a space traversed by rat and wolf-vectors, conjuring a schizophrenic metaphysics. … Land's writings fold genre in on itself, splicing disparate sources from philosophy, literature, science, occultism, and pulp fiction (Immanuel Kant, William Gibson, Deleuze-Guattari, Norbert Wiener, Kurt Gödel, Kenneth Grant, *Terminator* and *Apocalypse Now*, Antonin Artaud, H.P. Lovecraft…)" (Brassier and MacKay 1).

of Schopenhauer's Kantian fear of women, who are seen as "so terribly non-Platonic, so outrageously vital and real, so excessive in relation to the cold sterile perfection of the ideas" ("Art" 161). In their philosophical *fragments*, Adorno and Horkheimer similarly condemn the forces of homogenization: Enlightenment reason, the culture industry, etc. In face of this homogenization they celebrate a style-less art of artists "whose works [never] embodied style in its least fractured, most perfect form" but which, instead, "contain[ed] objective tendencies which resist the style they incarnate" (103).

This thought reaches back to at least the work of Nietzsche who saw Kant as corrupting philosophy with "theologians' blood" (*The Antichrist* 576), as "an idiot" and a "catastrophic spider" (578) whose philosophy, "elusive, pale, Nordic, Königsbergian" is at heart Christian, levelling all worldly difference in the thought of "the true [transcendental] world" that remains "a consolation, an obligation, an imperative" and comes just before "the first yawn of reason" (*Twilight of the Idols* 485). Correspondingly, in his *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Deleuze – who wrote his study of Kant as "a book on an enemy" (xv) – "sets Nietzsche against the models of thinking at work in Kant and Hegel," proposing "to think against reason in resistance to Kant's assertion of the self-justifying authority of reason alone" (Aylesworth). On a fundamental level, these are all elaborations of a "thought of the irreducible *multitude of worlds*, each of them sustained by a specific language-game" (Žižek, *Parallax View* 37), elaborations of a bodies-and-languages worldview of democratic materialism. In light of the rise of totalitarian regimes in the first half of the twentieth century, as well as more general trends in Western society such as patriarchy and sexism, colonialism and racism, these projects are important and laudable. Their focus on anti-essentialism, intersectionality, and coalitional politics is even today, politically and ethically, extremely valuable and should not be neglected or written off. Nevertheless, their

focus on difference misses the dimension of truths that Badiou writes of, and it is precisely Kant as a kind of obscene shadow of postmodern theory's discourse on difference that brings forth this notion of truths today.

Kant is often publicly treated like shit by postmodern theory[36], at least when it comes to the issues surrounding Kantian elaborations of metaphysics and rationality. Even Lyotard, who draws upon Kant's work substantially, describes himself as a Kantian "if you wish, but [only a Kantian] of the Third Critique" (qtd. in Reading 79). Lyotard thus distinguishes between the 'bad' Kant and the 'good' Kant, between "the rule-bound nature of the First Critique and the capacity of the imagination in the Third Critique as the power of *experimental* judgment without pre-existing criteria which parallels the experimental paralogism of the postmodern aesthetic" (79). It should, thus, perhaps not be surprising that a version of the 'good' Kant also forms, as Brassier notes, the backbone of postmodernity's correlationist bend:

> The junction of metaphysics and epistemology is marked by the intersection of two threads: the epistemological thread that divides sapience from sentience and the metaphysical thread that distinguishes the reality of the concept from the reality of the object. Kant taught us to discern the first thread. But his correlationist heirs …

[36] Because of a lack of a precise definition and delineation and as a result of the contested meaning of the term, talking generally about postmodernism is notoriously difficult. As such, all statements about postmodernism here (and elsewhere; and the same is true of other umbrella terms that try to delineate an epochal trend in art, theory, and philosophy: modernism, poststructuralism, etc.) should be taken with an appropriate amount of scepticism and an eye on the particularities that these generalizations fail to fold within themselves. These statements, as all generalizations, neglect much that is particular and should be read as an approximate delineation of trends and a launching point for the present discussion, rather than an attempt to have a final word on all texts that could be or are considered to be postmodern. Criticisms of any of these attempts at periodization should always be seen as attempts to engage and overcome, rather than simply negate, a given target of criticism.

> underscored its significance at the expense of the metaphysical thread. The occultation of the latter, following the liquidation of the in-itself, marks correlationism's slide from epistemological sobriety into ontological incontinence. ("Concepts and Objects" 49)

In other words, Kant's focus on the way the human mind comes to know things via faculties of understanding and reason (and judgement) has provided postmodern theory with its driving impetus in the notion that it is ultimately human consciousness and language, and their relation to the 'objective' realm of things (in which the mind and language are privileged), that form fundamental objects of theoretical and philosophical investigation (see Meillassoux 5 – 7).

The fundamental stance of much of postmodern theory is hence epistemological: it privileges knowledge over information – which, unlike knowledge, is not "answerable to normative standards of truth and falsity, correctness and incorrectness" (Brassier, "Concepts" 49) – and it "eviscerates the object, voiding it of substance and rendering metaphysics weightless. Tipping the scale toward conception, it paves the way for conceptual idealism by depriving epistemology of its metaphysical counterweight. Conceptual idealism emphasizes the normative valence of knowing at the cost of eliding the metaphysical autonomy of the in-itself" (49). This conceptual idealism, built upon the foundation of Kantian thought, is precisely the thought of the irreducible multitude of worlds that are sustained by specific language-games and that are, paradoxically, built upon a vehement rejection of a particular facet of the Kantian project. Kant's thought is here the obscene shadow of the official postmodernist discourse ostensibly built upon his denigration.

As such, it is precisely our focus on the Kantian in-itself that brings forth the element of truths back into the discourse of contemporary theory: the in-itself, the object, is "presupposed as already given in the act of knowing or conception. But it is presupposed without being posited"

(Brassier, "Concept" 55). This object is, hence, actual: it is, within our context, the physical human body as well as the physical timespace, both of which the grotesque aesthetic mode evokes via the concept of plasticity (and through empirical science as its conceptual background as well as through its links with the Lacanian notion of subjectivity, as discussed above). Unlike the phenomenal representation of these things within consciousness, the actuality of the physical human form and of the physical timespace is epistemologically non-normative, it does not rest or depend upon any form of knowledge. Rather, there is something in it, "in the object itself [that] determines the discrepancy between its material reality – the fact *that* it is, its existence – and its being, construed as quiddity, or what it is" (55). Here, "the reality of the object determines the meaning of its conception, and allows the discrepancy between that reality and the way in which it is conceptually circumscribed to be measured" (55). This parallels Žižek's notion of the parallax view through which we can also come to determine the object in its materiality[37] and which we explored earlier in relation to the London narratives. "This," adds Brassier, "should be understood in contrast to the classic correlationist model according to which it is conceptual

[37] From Frederic Jameson's review of Žižek's *The Parallax View:* "A parallax, *Webster's* says, is 'the apparent displacement of an observed object due to a change in the position of the observer'; but it is best to put the emphasis not on the change or shift, so much as on the multiplicity of observational sites, for in my opinion it is the absolute incommensurability of the resultant descriptions or theories of the object that Žižek is after, rather than some mere symptomal displacement. The idea thus brings us back to that old bugbear of postmodern relativism, to which it is certainly related. … The … fundamental difference at issue can be measured by comparing the parallax idea with the old Heisenberg principle, which asserted that the object can never be known, owing to the interference of our own observational system, the insertion of our own point of view and related equipment between ourselves and the reality in question. Heisenberg is then truly 'postmodern' in the assertion of an absolute indeterminacy of the real or the object, which withdraws into the status of a Kantian noumenon. In parallax thinking, however, the object can certainly be determined, but only indirectly, by way of a triangulation based on the incommensurability of the observations."

meaning that determines the 'reality' of the object, understood as the relation between representing and represented" (55).

By uncovering the in-itself as the actual, the grotesque also reveals Kant as the obscene shadow of postmodern/contemporary theory – its real Real. It is not, therefore, surprising that Žižek sees in Kant's notion of the sublime Noumenal an expression of "pure horror," in which "man 'as such,' deprived of all phenomenal qualifications, appears as inhuman monster" (*Parallax* 342). "The problem with human rights humanism" as an expression of democratic materialism's bodies-and-languages politics is, hence, "that it covers up this monstrosity of the 'human as such,' presenting it as a sublime human essence" (342). (This line of thinking does not – ought not – invalidate human rights humanism as a project. Rather, it should focus our attention on the danger of elevating a de-politicized ethical, often Western, subject whose sublime essence makes her/him human, over the political one, whose monstrosity emerges as that which disturbs the present order[38].) In this conceptualisation of Kant's sublime Noumenal, we see also an account of the grotesque as an elaboration of matter, whose plasticity marks it as non-thing, or as monstrous in the sense that it is a signifier of de-formation and metamorphosis, of dissensus.

Of course, as Delany's texts show us, this (in a limited sense) Noumenal/monstrous representation of matter often borders representations of Divinity as an immaterial/sublime lack of phenomenal characteristics. This is particularly evident in the Return to Nevèrÿon series in which, as Darieck Scott notes, Delany develops a "secular, sceptical antimystical mysticism" premised on a multiplicity of nameless gods that form the religious background of Nevèrÿon ("Delany's Divinities" 716). This is a recognition that, like monsters, "the divine … is a gesture

[38] For an excellent discussion of the distinction and relation between the ethical and the political, see Chapter 9, "Ethics," of Alexander Galloway's *Laruelle: Against the Digital*, (177 – 193).

toward a radical departure from the knowable … not into what 'man is not meant to know,'" but "into how what we don't know is what we either cannot or do not *speak* or give name to in language, but which we totter on the edge of naming and speaking" (717). Yet grotesque's historical alignment with materialism and the ethics of bodies, as well as its oppositional and subversive history in the most often religious social context in the West, predisposes it toward the representations of plastic or metamorphosing bodies/matter as a register of that which we are on the edge of speaking. As a fundamentally materialist aesthetic form, grotesque is, like materialism in general, "risky, messy business…. It does not grant anyone the low-effort luxury of fleeing into the uncluttered, fact-free ether of a 'fundamental ontology' serenely separate from the historically shifting stakes of ontic disciplines" (Johnston 171). Like materialism, this aesthetic form "should be contestable as receptive, responsive, and responsible vis-à-vis the sciences" (171). In other words, its logic of necessary contingency ought to be supplemented with the nomological necessity of empirical sciences. Delany's inclusion of medical reports on AIDS and its relationship to sexual practices, as well as his consequent elaboration "a discourse that foregrounds detailed sexual honesty, imagination, and articulation" ("Thomas L. Long Interview" 123) register this in his fiction.

Brassier's argument that "the reality of the object determines the meaning of its conception" – that thought supervenes on matter; that matter is ancestral – brings us to the second aspect of the grotesque as the real Real: the modality of necessary contingency as the formal support of the actual. Here, we must be careful not to fall back into the correlationist trap that would see in the pair 'matter' (as actual) and 'necessary contingency' (as a logical category) another example of the co-relation. Rather, we must insist on two complementary propositions: a) we are not here dealing with reciprocal presupposition as there is no way in which matter as

necessarily contingent is affected by its logical status[39]; and b) the grotesque as an aesthetic mode occupies the parallax space between matter as actual and its phenomenal manifestation, so that it is precisely through it as the third component of the triangulation actuality–aesthetics–phenomenal manifestation that matter's (and physical timespace's) status as necessarily contingent (and hence as the real Real, which is here paradoxically seen to be deeply implicated in the notion of contingency) becomes revealed[40].

The actual *qua* actual simply is: it is "a fact, rather than an absolute" because we "cannot ground [its] necessity…. [It] can only be described, not founded" and it, consequently, "does not provide me with any positive knowledge" (Meillassoux 39). Rather than identifying this as

> a limit that thought encounters in its search for the ultimate reason, we must [in a truly Hegelian fashion] understand that this absence of reason *is*, and can *only* be the *ultimate* property of the entity. We must convert facticity into the real property whereby everything and every world *is* without reason, and is thereby *capable of actually becoming otherwise without reason*. … ['Unreason'] is an absolute ontological property, and not the mark of finitude of our knowledge. … [T]here is no reason for anything to be or to remain thus and so rather than otherwise … not by virtue of some superior law

[39] As Land writes: "Wild matter is untouched by its difference from spirit, insofar as this is supposed to depend upon a logical disjunction" ("Spirit and Teeth" 187).

[40] Aesthetics as the third term is, of course, something we already find in Kant, for whom the faculty of (aesthetic and teleological) judgement is the third term between the faculties of understanding and reason, which allows for their free and unregulated accord – accord through discord, or in Deleuzean terms, "discordant harmony." As Deleuze writes, "the harmony between the faculties can appear only in the form of a *discordant harmony,* since each communicates to the other only the violence which confronts it with its own difference and its divergence from the others. Kant was the first to provide the example of such a discordant harmony, the relation between imagination and thought which occurs in the case of the sublime" (*Difference and Repetition* 146).

whereby everything is destined to perish, but by virtue of the absence of any superior law capable of preserving anything, no matter what, from perishing. (Meillassoux 53)

The grotesque puts the notion that "there is no reason for anything to be or to remain thus and so rather than otherwise" on display firstly through its status as the imaginary Real: its fleshy metamorphoses function precisely as images of constant flux. As we discussed, this is an elaboration of its plasticity. Furthermore, through its status as the symbolic Real, via which the body intact and the body actual are invoked, the grotesque shows us that necessary contingency is also *an ontological property of (the) Real/ity and thus a mark of the ex/change between the Real and reality, between being and beings*: the grotesque, thus, "releases us from the phenomenal stability of empirical constants by elevating us to the purely intelligible chaos that underlies every aspect of it" (83) while at the same time showing how this intelligible chaos is always caught up in various forms of structuring. Importantly, within the context of the present discussion, these various forms of structuring depend upon nomological laws uncovered by empirical science through which plasticity of bodies is recognized as organic and conceptual plasticity, rather than an absolute chaos of erratic metamorphoses.

While not being the only symbolic elaboration of this, the grotesque shows us that the stability of empirical constants is necessarily contingent. It does so by both concretizing this notion as an image (the body deformed), and by deploying this image as a parallax object which uses "an 'epistemological' shift in the subject's point of view" to "reflect[ ] an 'ontological' shift in the object itself" (Žižek, *Parallax* 17). This means that it is the epistemological viewpoint – revealed by the grotesque as the symbolic Real (the opening up of the internal to the external, physical spacetime) which allows us to see why the Nietzschean critique of Truth misses the

mark – that also allows us to glimpse matter's status as the real Real, as formally supported by the modality of necessary contingency. Materialism is, in this sense,

> not the direct assertion of my inclusion in objective reality (…[as this] presupposes that my position of enunciation is that of an external observer who can grasp the whole of reality); rather, it resides in the reflexive twist by means of which I … am included in the picture constituted by me – it is this reflexive short circuit, this necessary redoubling of myself as standing both outside and inside my picture, that bears witness to my "material existence." Materialism means that the reality I see is never "whole" – not because a large part of it eludes me, but because it contains a stain, a blind spot, which indicates my inclusion in it. (Žižek, *Parallax View* 17)

The grotesque as an aesthetic mode is the marker of this blind spot and of this doubling: by imaging the body deformed and by, hence, invoking the body intact, it reveals the actuality of the body and of timespace, as well as their phenomenal manifestations.

The phenomenal manifestations of bodies and of timespace are directly linked to this aesthetic mode's functioning as the imaginary Real (via the nature of the image as always perceived). The actuality of bodies and of timespace evoked by the grotesque, on the other hand, produces an ontological shift in the object itself that reveals to us "the purely intelligible chaos that underlies every aspect of" our empirical reality (Meillassoux 83) – its necessary contingency or messiness, which acts as this empirical reality's real Real, the abstract form which structures the disposition of actually existing elements around it. This also reveals that necessary contingency (supplemented with nomological necessity) is the logical modality of plasticity in both the discursive and organic realms. Malabou notes precisely this aspect of plasticity in her *The New Wounded* (2007), an exploration of the intersections between neurology and

psychoanalysis, in which she argues that the Symbolic emerges out of "the formation and deformation of neuronal connections … since the elementary form of the brain is the emotional and logical core where the processes of auto-affection constitute all identity and all history" (212). The brain is made up of processes of formation and de-formation, and its plasticity – its nature as always potentially different, as necessarily contingent – is what, on an elementary level, gives the Symbolic structures their potential for change.

As we have seen, Samuel Delany's fiction is a discursive embodiment of plasticity. As interested in teetering on the edge of the unsayable, it does much to bring the above-described aspect of plasticity out through discourse. This philosophical concern is deeply related to Delany's aesthetic choices and his novels' grotesque content and texture through which he tries to concretize the non-thingness, the metamorphic tendency of beings (objects) and being. As he notes, paraliterature – comic books, pornography, science fiction and fantasy, film and television – has been largely able to avoid literature's focus on the exploration of the subject ("Semiology of Silence" 142). Instead, this form of writing has developed "a complex codic system by which the codic system we call the 'object' … can be … criticized – unto its overlap with the subject" (143). Via his exploration of this codic system, Delany has managed to draw our attention to that which often structures it: the Möbius strip of discursive and organic plasticity through which the object itself emerges on the edge of the discourse on the object.

The Mad Man is a perfect elaboration of this: its discursive representations of desire and what happens, knotted together in depictions of abject sexual practices, are an elaboration of an aspiration for (non-cohesive) totality as an ethical act resting on actuality (political situatedness and physical nature) of bodies. As Kevin Floyd writes,

> Delany bears witness … both to gay male sociality that is irreducibly sexual … and to its active dispersal by the state. He … insists that "the first direct sense of political power comes from the apprehension of massed bodies." … "[I]t's not the fact" of these massed bodies "but the vision" that is important here, the critique of dispersal and isolation this moment makes possible. To aspire to totality is here not merely to wish for social plenitude but to critique social fragmentation. (*The Reification of Desire* 212)

I would, nevertheless, insist that the fact of these bodies as bodies, as caught up in this discourse and as external to it, is of fundamental importance. Their representation as actual bodies – through realism (*The Mad Man*) and autobiography (*Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*) – is precisely what gives them such affective force.

While the totality that critiques social fragmentation that Floyd highlights is, indeed, discursive and strategic, it nevertheless includes the actuality of bodies and sexual practices these bodies engage in. Sections of the novel such as this one, in which Leaky speaks to Marr:

> The fact is … with you, I'm about as close as I *wanna* be to my perfect … you know, fantasy. … Any closer, except as a now-and-then thing, and I wouldn't be comfortable. … I've had that. In real life. … And while that can make the imagination thing *better*, over the long haul, it just ain't as good as it is when it's in your head. You got to balance the two of 'em out – what you got in real life with what you like to do in your head. And you, real as you are, cocksucker, you're just *right* for my imagination. (480)

or Marr's sexual partner's practical explanation of why one can't be both a good piss-drinker and a good shit-eater at the same time (392), or Delany's inclusion of a medical study of "risk factors for seroconversion to human immunodeficiency virus among male homosexuals" in the appendix of *The Mad Man*, are all – even though they are discursively and inter-narratively deployed –

signs of the inclusion of the extra-discursive actuality that "borders discourse" but "can only be envisaged through a discourse function" (Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing* 56). They show us that desire and what happens, as embodied, must be included in our thinking about discourse.

These bodies' plasticity as necessarily contingent emerges in *The Mad Man* and the Nevèrÿon cycle in the only way it can: as imaginary Real representations of grotesquerie. These representations – monstrous creatures as well as bodies that are maimed and de-formed, covered with scars as "thick as … fingers and worm[ing] around … soiled flanks" ("The Tale of Gorgik" 32) and with dirty feet with "foul toenails" (33), or Gorgik's own "high-veined and heavy" body with "eyes permanently reddened from rockdust, a scar from a pickax … spilling one brown cheekbone," "huge and rough-palmed" hands, and "foot soles like cracked leather" (37) – consistently draw our attention to impermanence and decomposition of matter. These bodies' penetrability as well as their various (in *The Mad Man* often ingested) discharges, further stress matter's plasticity, its status as non-thing. In the images of the grotesque human body, we see 'objecthood' as absolutely immanent, located at the very core of subjectivity itself. This lack of permanence is expressed in thought via the modality of necessary contingency, and it also registers thought – and subjectivity – as emerging in/from this very objecthood.

Finally, despite the above-mentioned strategic (ethico-political) aspiration to totality, the onto-logical status of the Real guarantees the impossibility of reality's totalization: "Insofar as it is grounded in the finitude of humans [or related to their contingency], ontological difference," elaborated in the present context as the "minimal difference" between the contingency of there being *something* and there being *nothing*, "is that which makes a totalization of the 'All of beings' impossible – ontological difference means that the field of reality is finite" (Žižek,

Parallax 24). Or as Eugene Thacker writes, "Life is not total in three general ways…. It is temporally based, and thus cannot be grasped in a single observation; it is rooted in the dynamics of possible forms and forming; and its changeability raises the question of some immaterial principle that is common to each of its particular instances" (259 – 260). Plasticity – as a concept exemplifying the non-totality and transformability of what Thacker calls life – embodies precisely these forms of non-totality while recognizing the ancestrality of bodies and timespace.

In other words, even though empirical reality is and must always be univocal, its status as necessarily contingent reveals that the gap between the actuality of there being bodies and the actuality of there being nothing is minimal, always asymptotically approaching zero. There could have always been nothing. And it is the fact that the field of reality is always material/ finite that warrants that this is so by remaining necessarily contingent. This formal category, then, reveals "*the structure of the possible as such*" which "must *necessarily* be untotalizable. … [T]his does not imply that the non-All is merely one possibility among others" as "only those theories that ratify the non-All harbour an ontological scope" (Meillassoux 127). Or, as Žižek puts it: "The parallax Real is … that which accounts for the very *multiplicity* of appearances of the same underlying Real – it is not the hard core which persists as the Same, but the hard bone of contention which pulverizes the sameness into the multitude of appearances" (*Parallax* 26). The real Real that the grotesque aesthetic mode reveals, then, is rooted in the actuality of bodies, in their finite, material nature as necessarily contingent. However, this abstract, onto-logical aspect of the grotesque has no tangible effect upon the actuality of matter. It, rather, functions only as a kind of ancestral expression of matter's reality *for* consciousness *without* a reciprocal presupposition. The necessary contingency of the material world, finally, reveals and reaffirms the simple truth of "a world that is *separable* from man" (Meillassoux 115).

CONCLUSION

"— All Us Zombies —"

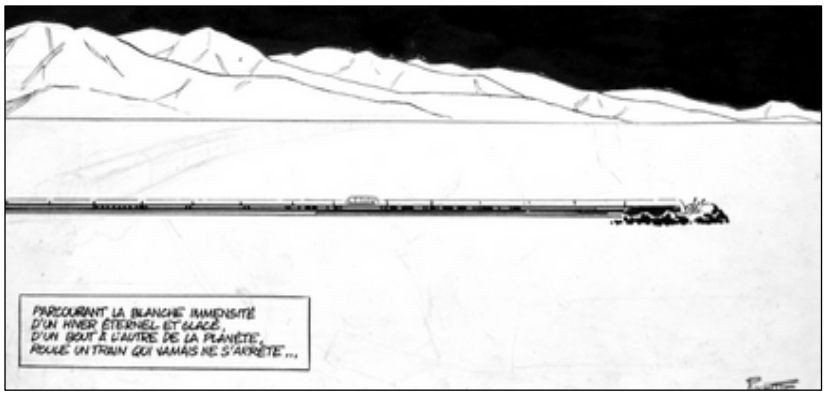


Figure 1: The Final Image of Lob and Rochette's *Le Transperceneige*

Two thousand and thirteen's *Snowpiercer* – a film based on Jacques Lob and Jean-Marc Rochette's *La Transperceneige* – ends with the image of two children stepping off of a now destroyed but once perpetually moving, globe-circling train that carried on it the last of humankind[1]. In the distance, in a world covered by snow, they see life: a polar bear. A modern-day Eve and Adam, Yona and Timmy's emergence into a newly habitable world – once practically destroyed by human activity – is an image of *ekpyrosis*, a periodic apocalypse after which the world is built anew. They represent a non-human humanity that, the film argues via this utopo-apocalyptic image, must emerge for the good of all life on our planet.

'Humanity' is here a signifier/woof tightly weaved into the warp of the Symbolic, of economic and socio-political organizations of the material world. The grotesque aesthetic form, premised in its contemporary mode on the image of de-formations of the human body that engenders a mixed emotional response we termed anxiety, engages with this signifier on two levels. On the one hand, within the realm of the Symbolic itself, it challenges hegemonic notions

[1] The comic, alternately, ends with the hero's capitulation, the death of everyone else onboard, and the continuation – amid the hero's realization that it can and will not run indefinitely – of the train's movement (see Figure 1).

of humanity and its economic and socio-political situatedness. Punk and its aftermath, and post-1968 US grotesqueries of Acosta and Thompson served as our examples of how this aesthetic mode can effectuate Benjaminian constellational mode of history through which past political failures can be deployed in the interest of progressive solutions to present tensions and struggles. Questions of politics – of class, race, gender, and sexuality, of cultural and personal identity, of ideology, exploitation and marginalization, and of various political coalitions in relation to the economic and socio-political context – are here imperative. Through its engagement with these political questions, the grotesque allows us to see the Symbolic as the non-All, an open and constantly metamorphosing material and discursive field within which what was once nothing (invisible) can suddenly become present.

On the other hand, from within the Symbolic – via discourse – grotesque also situates our I/eye on the edge of discourse, allowing us to 'see' and think the realm of the Real. As that which escapes the Symbolic and "over which the symbolic stumbles" (Sheridan x), the most important trait of the Real in the context of our discussion (as explored in the third and fourth chapters) is that it opens the closed realm of capitalo-parliamentalism/democratic materialism to the non-anthropocentric realm of matter. Through evoking external timespaces, subjectivity/ thought as supervenient on the body/brain, and matter as ancestral, the grotesque reveals the Real as motivating an act of refocusing that situates the political within an ethical context. While, as Alexander Galloway argues in his study of Laruelle, the political particularizes – via class, sexuality, gender, race, creating subjects who practice fidelity to an event – the ethical "radicalize[s] the generic condition of humanity" (182). "The point is not to universalize the liberal subject," Galloway writes, "but … to do the opposite, to underdetermine persons rather than overdetermine them" (182). (This, importantly, does not erase the political: the two, rather,

exist in concert, supplementing and reinforcing one another.) By opening the vista of the Real, the grotesque radically underdetermines persons by taking an unambiguously materialist perspective and, hence, participating in the assault on the great chain of being. This materialist perspective is non-anthropocentric, presenting consciousness as gradational and humans as animal/matter-ial.

The non-human vista of the Real, then, has – or ought to have – significant implications for the functioning of the Symbolic. As *Snowpiercer* shows, the critique of the current Symbolic – late-stage capitalism – is tightly bound with the non-anthropocentric perspective that forces us to face "an apocalyptic zero-point" of this system: "the ecological crisis, the consequences of the biogenetic revolution, imbalances within the system … (problems with intellectual property; … struggles over raw materials, food and water), and the explosive growth of social divisions and exclusions" (Žižek, *Living* x). Both sides of the Janus-faced grotesque, thus, delineate a critique of humanity through the image of the non-human, even – and especially – when this image is projected onto the human body/form as its metamorphosis and de-formation. The grotesque, then, via the image of violent metamorphoses of the human form, tries to locate the monstrous inhumanity of the human: "the terrifying excess which, although negating what we understand as humanity, is inherent to being human" (Žižek, *Less than Nothing* 166). This is the non-humanity of humanity, its non-thingness that places its being within the realm of ex/change with beings. This inhumanity is, paradoxically, the very core of the political and ethical existence of humanity.

As Žižek frequently notes, there is no better image for this conceptualization than the zombie: the living dead, a slowly decomposing human form hungry for human flesh. As a grotesque signifer, the zombie is necessarily contingent: its function depends largely on the

discursive and social contexts within which it is deployed. Today, the zombie is one of the most profitable monsters in comics, film, books, television, and video games: even a cursory search leads to a copious number of best-selling titles – *World War Z*, *The Last of Us*, *Warm Bodies*, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, *The Walking Dead*, *Shaun of the Dead* – via which capitalism feeds its axiomatic. Annual zombie walks – Toronto's 2014 walk had approximately 10000 participants, about 7000 of which were costumed – further testify to this figure's mainstream popularity. The zombie's origins, however, are deeply politically subversive: it is "a New World phenomenon," writes Amy Wilentz, "that arose from the mixture of old African religious beliefs and the pain of slavery, especially the notoriously merciless and coldblooded slavery of … pre-independence Haiti. … To become a zombie was the slave's worst nightmare: to be dead and still a slave, an eternal field hand."

Figure 2: George A. Romero's 1968 Zombie

The traces of this genealogy are plainly visible today in movies like *Shaun of the Dead*, in which being a zombie is equated with the routine of a mindless salesperson (or office worker) whose life has become a kind of death. In his "Capitalist Monsters," Steven Shaviro expands upon this notion, equating capitalism's rapacity with "something absolutely inhuman and unrecognisable" such as Lovecraft's Cthulhu (285) and the labourers caught in it with zombies. Within this inhuman system that, in its complexity, seems to work by magic or via occult forces,

"the zombie subsists as a *universal* [human] *residue*" (288). And in late capitalism's global context, where exploitation is most acute and visible in the relation between the global 'centre' and its 'periphery,' the figure of the zombie "circulates between the First World and Third," "between work and idleness, or alienated production and conspicuous consumption" (289).

In *Zombie Capitalism*, Chris Harman expands the allegory of the zombie from a part of the system (the labourer) to the system as a whole, arguing that the "neoclassical" defence of capitalism (9), according to which the system always finally balances itself in the creation of ever-expanding prosperity, has today become indefensible. Twenty-first century "capitalism as a whole," he writes, "is a zombie system, seemingly dead when it comes to achieving human goals and responding to human feelings, but capable of sudden spurts of activity that cause chaos all around" (12).

This negative/critical edge of the zombie figure is well delineated in the story "All You Zombies—" by Robert A. Heinlein, written in 1960. A tale that explores the paradoxes of time travel, "All You Zombies—" centers on a male (later revealed to be intersex) "temporal agent" whose mission is to go back in time to recruit his past self for the work he is currently doing. The added paradox of the story is that he is also his own mother and father: a part of the recruiting mission involves taking his post-sex change male self back in time to impregnate his pre-operative female self ("It's a shock to have it proved to you that you can't resist seducing yourself" (412), the protagonist relates). The tale thus focuses on various stages of the main character's life, symbolically figured by the ring he wears: "The Worm Ouroboros … the World Snake that eats its own tail, forever without end" (404). The central grotesque image of the story depicts the "mess" the doctor finds inside the protagonist's body after her/his labour/ birth: "two full sets of organs, both immature, but with the female set well enough developed for you to have

a baby" (407). As the narrative ends, the protagonist retires, asking "I *know* where I *came* from – but where did all you zombies come from?" (414). With this, the story sets the richness of the folded, unfolded, and refolded human organism against the sterility of the image of the zombie, explaining thereby the link between this figure and the way humans are interpellated into and diminished by the "absolutely inhuman" capitalist system.

While preserving this signification of the zombie figure, the contemporary – post 1968 – grotesque, as discussed above, also reveals its 'positive' side: its existence at the very core of humanity. In George A. Romero's 1968 film *Night of the Living Dead*, the zombie figure is a threat to a human group of survivors, yet its presence – in conjunction with the film's black lead who is, ironically, mistaken for a zombie and killed by a human mob at the end of the film – also makes prominent the vulgarity of the human zombie-hunting mob, whose visual representation echoes the images of early twentieth century lynch mobs, as well as the white, conservative, anti-civil rights rallies and police departments' often brutal response to the 1960s civil rights movement [Figure 3]. The figure of the zombie is here folded into the Symbolic, along with its human element. Unlike Heinlein's story, which opposes the richness of the enfolded human life to the austerity of the zombie, *Night of the Living Dead* deploys the contemporary grotesque function of this figure: like various representatives of humanity, the

Figure 3: The Zombie-Hunting Mob in Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*

zombie is here a part of our world that reveals both the inhumanity of the mob and the politico-ethical aspects of the non-humanity of Ben, the black protagonist who is equated with a zombie and killed.

Figure 4: Fungal Zombie of *Last of Us*

This function of the zombie – in significant ways *the* contemporary grotesque monster – is apparent in many of the post-Romero zombie films (and comics and video games and television shows) in which the zombie is us, a part of our world, and we are the monsters. Most recently, the 2013 video game *The Last of Us* affirms this vision of the zombie, as it ends with the protagonist's refusal – negation as ethical choice – to sacrifice his adopted daughter for the vaccine that would stop the spread of the fungus that turns humans into grotesque zombie-like monsters [Figure 4][2]. The existence of these creatures in *our* world – *The Last of Us* is one of the best examples of video game realism – is thus thoroughly normalized through the protagonist's (and via the protagonist the player's) acceptance of this world, which is in many ways similar to that of *Night of the Living Dead* and which is concomitant with his refusal to sacrifice his adopted daughter.

The enfolding of the zombie figure, as an example of the grotesque aesthetic form, into the human world reveals the non-human core of humanity and its political ('negative' or

[2] The image above is taken from http://www.tested.com/science/weird/456585-very-real-very-creepy-science-behind-last-us-fungus-zombies, which comments on the game's realism and its "grounded-in-reality scientific explanation of how zombies came to be. The zombies in *The Last of Us* aren't your classic George Romero shambling undead. They're fungi."

Figure 5: London Calling

particularizing) and ethical ('positive' or generic) aspects. Zombie thus truly is, as Shaviro notes, the universal human residue, in two ways. One: it is a universal human residue as that which indexes the dynamic and structure of the Symbolic and reveals its human component as circulating between alienated production and conspicuous consumption, and as marked by race, gender, and sexuality; and two: as that which indexes the "terrifying excess which, although negating what we understand as humanity, is inherent to being human" (Žižek, *Less than Nothing* 166) and marks its political and ethical potentiality. A de-forming, decomposing human form, the zombie is thus an image embodying and deploying a critique of the Symbolic, as well as a representation of non-human matter: a living, consuming, excreting, metamorphosing corpus, whose world is one and should therefore be protected.

WORKS CITED

Ackroyd, Peter. *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*. London: Vintage, 1998. Print.

----. *Hawksmoor*. New York: Penguin Books, 1993. Print.

----. *London: The Biography*. New York: Vintage Books, 2001. Print.

Acosta, Oscar Zeta. *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989. Print.

----. *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989. Print.

Adorno, Theodor. "Cultural Criticism and Society." *The Adorno Reader*. Ed. Brian O'Connor. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000. 195 – 210. Print.

Aldama, Frederick Luis. *Postethnic Narrative Criticism: Magicorealism in Oscar "Zeta" Acosta, Ana Castillo, Julie Dash, Hanif Kureishi, and Salman Rushdie*. Austin: U of Texas P, 2003. Print.

Anspaugh, Kelly. "'Jean qui rit and Jean qui pleure': James Joyce, Wyndham Lewis and the High Modern Grotesque." *Literature and the Grotesque*. Ed. Michael J. Meyer. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995. 129 – 152. Print.

Aristotle. *Metaphysics*. *The Basic Works of Aristotle*. New York: The Modern Library, 2001. Print.

Aston, Elaine. *Feminist Views on the English Stage: Women Playwrights 1990 – 2000*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003. Print.

Aylesworth, Gary. "Postmodernism." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2015 Edition). Ed. Edward N. Zalta. 5 Feb. 2015. Web. 16 Feb. 2015. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/postmodernism/>

Badiou, Alain. "'Always keep an eye on Québec,' Alain Badiou advises." Interview with François Gauvin. *Verso.* 15 June 2012. Web. 5 Sept. 2013. <http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1033-always-keep-an-eye-on-quebec-alain-badiou-advises>

----. *Being and Event*. Transl. Oliver Feltham. New York: Continuum, 2007. Print.

----. *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*. Transl. Louise Burchill. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000. Print.

----. *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*. Transl. Peter Hallward. New York: Verso, 2001. Print.

----. *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event, 2*. Transl. Alberto Toscano. New York: Continuum, 2009. Print.

----. *The Century*. Transl. by Alberto Toscano. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007. Print.

Baehr, Ted. "Time Warner Promotes Terrorism and Anti-Christian Bigotry in New Leftist Movie, *V for Vendetta*." *WorldNetDaily.com.* N.d. 17 Mar. 2006. Web. 15 Oct. 2010. <http://www.wnd.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=49317>

Baker, Daniel. "Why We Need Dragons: The Progressive Potential of Fantasy." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 23.3 (2012): 437 – 459. Web.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. "Discourse in the Novel." *Dialogic Imagination*. Transl. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1981. 259 – 422. Print.

----. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Ed. and Transl. Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2003. Print.

----. *Rabelais and His World*. Transl. Hélène Iswolsky. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1984. Print.

Baldick, Chris. "Mode." *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. 213. Print.

Balfour, Ian. "The Gift of Example: Derrida and the Origins of the Eighteenth Century." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 40.3 (2007): 467 – 472. Web.

Banco, Lindsey Michael. "Trafficking Trips: Drugs and the Anti-Tourist Novels of Hunter S. Thompson and Alex Garland." *Studies in Travel Writing* 11 (2007): 127 – 153. Web.

Barasch, Frances K. "Definitions: Renaissance and Baroque, Grotesque Construction and Deconstruction." *Modern Language Studies* 13.2 (1983): 60 – 67. Web.

----. "Grotesque, theories of." *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms*. Ed. Irena R. Makaryk. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1993. 85 – 90. Print.

----. "The Grotesque as a Comic Genre." *Modern Language Studies* 15.1 (1985): 3 – 11. Web.

----. *The Grotesque: A Study in Meanings*. The Hague: Mouton, 1971. Print.

Barlow, Keith. *The Labour Movement in Britain from Thatcher to Blair*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang GmbH, 2008. Web.

Barry, Elizabeth. "Beckett, Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Catastrophe." *Beckett's Literary Legacies*. Eds. Matthew Feldman and Mark Nixon. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2007. 169 – 187. Print.

Bell, Sean. "Tomorrow Belongs to Her: The Art That Rose Against Thatcher." *PopMatters.com*. N.p. 3 June 2013. Web. 7 July 2013. <http://www.popmatters.com/pm/column/171970-tomorrow-belongs-to-her-the-art-that-rose-against-thatcher/>

Benjamin, Walter. "Theses on the Philosophy of History." *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Transl. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1969. 253 – 264. Print.

----. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Transl. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1969. 217 – 251. Print.

Bergson, Henri. *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. New York: Cosimo, Inc., 2008. Print.

Bernard, Mark and James Bucky Carter. "Alan Moore and the Graphic Novel: Confronting the Fourth Dimension." *ImageTexT: Interdisciplinary Comic Studies* 1.2 (2004): n.p. Web.

Bernstein, Michael André. *Bitter Carnival:* Ressentiment *and the Abject Hero*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992. Print.

Birnbaum, Daniel and Anders Olsson. "An Interview with Jacques Derrida on the Limits of Digestion." *e-flux* 2 (Jan. 2009): n.p. Web. 4 Sept. 2014. <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/an-interview-with-jacques-derrida-on-the-limits-of-digestion>

Boireau, Nicole. "Steven Berkoff's Orgy: The Four-Letter Ecstasy." *Contemporary Theatre Review* 5.1 (1996): 77 – 89. Web.

Boon, Marcus. *In Praise of Copying*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2010. Web.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production*. New York: Columbia UP, 1993. Print.

----. *The Logic of Practice*. Transl. Richard Nice. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990. Web.

Brady, Brian. "Special report: They gave a Margaret Thatcher death party – but not many came." *The Independent* 14 Apr. 2013. Web. 9 July 2013. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/special-report-they-gave-a-margaret-thatcher-death-party--but-not-many-came-8572221.html>

Brand, Russell. "Russell Brand on Margaret Thatcher: 'I always felt sorry for her children.'" *The Guardian* 9 Apr. 2013. Web. 9 July 2013. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2013/apr/09/russell-brand-margaret-thatcher>

Brassier, Ray. "Alien Theory: The Decline of Materialism in the Name of Matter." Diss. University of Warwick, 2001. *Cinestatic Research*. 26 June 2012. Web. <http://www.cinestatic.com/trans-mat/Brassier/ALIENTHEORY.pdf>

----. "Axiomatic Heresy: The Non-Philosophy of François Laruelle." *Radical Philosophy* 121 (Sept./Oct. 2003): 24 – 35. Web.

----. "Behold the Non-Rabbit: Kant, Quine, Laruelle." *Pli* 12 (2001): 50 – 82. Web.

----. "Concepts and Objects." *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*. Ed. Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek and Graham Harman. Melbourne: re.press, 2011. 47 – 65. Print.

----. *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Print.

Brassier, Ray and Robin MacKay. "Editor's Introduction." *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987 – 2007*. By Nick Land. Eds. Robin MacKay and Ray Brassier. New York: Sequence Press, 2012. 1 – 54. Print.

Brinkley, Alan. "1968 and the Unraveling of Liberal America." *1968: The World Transformed*. Eds. Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert, and Detlef Junker. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998. 219 – 236. Web.

Bristol, Michael D. *Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England*. New York and London: Methuen, 1985. Print.

Bruce-Novoa. "Fear and Loathing on the Buffalo Trail." *MELUS* 6.4 (Winter 1979): 39 – 50. Web.

Bryant, Levi R. "What are Singularities?" *LarvalSubjects*. 14 June 2012. Web. 5 Sept. 2013. <http://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2012/06/14/what-are-singularities/>

Bryant, Levi R., Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman. "Towards a Speculative Philosophy." *The Speculative Turn*. Eds. Levi R. Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman. Melbourne: re.press, 2011. 1 – 18. Print.

Bürger, Peter. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984. Print.

Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. New York: Oxford UP, 1998. Print.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.

Calderón, Héctor. *Narratives of Greater Mexico: Essays on Chicano Literary History, Genre, and Borders*. Austin, U of Texas P, 2004. Print.

Call, Lewis. "Structures of Desire: Erotic Power in the Speculative Fiction of Octavia Butler and Samuel Delany." *Rethinking History* 9.2-3 (2005): 275 – 296. Web.

Carney, Sean. "The Tides of History: Alan Moore's Historiographic Vision." *ImageTexT: Interdisciplinary Comic Studies* 2.2 (2006): n.p. Web.

Carpenter, Humphrey. *A Great, Silly Grin: The British Satire Boom of the 1960s*. Boston: Da Capo Press, 2000. Web.

Carrasquillo, Marci L. "Oscar 'Zeta' Acosta's American Odyssey." *MELUS* 35.1 (Spring 2010): 77 – 97. Web.

Castagno, Paul C. "Grotesque Images of Early *Commedia dell'Arte* Iconography." *Theatre History Studies* 12 (1992): 45 – 65. Print.

Chamberlain, Marcia. "Oscar Zeta Acosta's *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*: A Fat Man's Recipe for Chicano Revolution." *Bodies Out of Bounds: Fatness and Transgression*. Eds. Jane Evans Braziel and Kathleen LeBesco. Berkeley: U of California P, 2001. 91 – 110. Print.

Charnick, David. "The Trope of the Tramp: Ackroyd's Vagrants at the Heart of the City." *The Literary London Journal* 9.2 (September 2011): n.p. Web. <www.literarylondon.org/london-journal/september2011/charnick.html>

Churchland, Paul M. *Plato's Camera: How the Physical Brain Captures a Landscape of Abstract Universals*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2012. Print.

Ciancio, Ralph A. "Nabokov and the Verbal Mode of the Grotesque." *Contemporary Literature* 18.4 (1977): 509 – 533. Print.

Clark, John R. *The Modern Satiric Grotesque and its Traditions*. Lexington, KY: UP of Kentucky, 1991. Print.

Clarkson, Wensley. *Quentin Tarantino: Shooting from the Hip*. London: Piatkus, 1995. Print.

Clayborough, Arthur. *The Grotesque in English Literature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965. Print.

Clemens, Justin. "Letters as the Condition of Conditions for Alain Badiou." *Communication & Cognition* 36.1-2 (2003): 73 – 102. Web.

"Closed System." *The Oxford Dictionary of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology*. Eds. Richard Cammack, Teresa Atwood, Peter Campbell, Howard Parish, Anthony Smith, Frank Vella, and John Stirling. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. *Oxford Reference Online*. Web. 17 Feb. 2011.

Cohen Shabot, Sara. "The Grotesque on Fleshing Out the Subject of Ethics." *Textual Ethos Studies, or Locating Ethics*. Ed. Anna Fahraeus and AnnKatrin Jonsson. New York: Rodopi, 2005. 67 – 84. Print.

Connelly, Frances S. "Introduction." *Modern Art and the Grotesque*. Ed. Frances S. Connelly. New York: Cambridge UP, 2003. 1 – 19. Print.

Conrad, Mark T. "*Reservoir Dogs*: Redemption in a Postmodern World." *The Philosophy of Neo-Noir*. Ed. Mark T. Conrad. Lexington, KY: UP of Kentucky, 2007. 101 – 116. Print.

Coronato, Rocco. *Jonson versus Bakhtin: Carnival and the Grotesque*. New York: Rodopi, 2003. Print.

Coulthard, Lisa. "Killing Bill: Rethinking Feminism and Film Violence." *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*. Ed. Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra. Durham: Duke UP, 2007. Print.

Coville, Gary and Patrick Luciano. *Jack the Ripper: His Life and Crimes in Popular Entertainment*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1999. Web.

Creed, Barbara. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. New York: Routledge, 2007. Web.

Critchley, Simon. "Being and Time, part 5: Anxiety." *The Guardian* 6 July 2009. Web. 12 Aug. 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2009/jul/06/heidegger-philosophy-being>

Crumb. Dir. Terry Zwigoff. Sony Pictures Classic, 1994. Film.

Dargis, Manohla. "Pulp Instincts." *Action/Spectacle Cinema: A Sight and Sound Reader*. Ed. José Arroyo. London, UK: BFI Publishing, 2000. 117 – 121. Print.

Davidson, Guy. "Utopia and Apocalypse in Samuel Delany's *The Mad Man*." *Journal of Modern Literature* 32.1 (Fall 2008): 13 – 32. Web.

Davis, Ray. "Delany's Dirt." *Ash of Stars: On the Writing of Samuel R. Delany*. Ed. James Sallis. Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi, 1996. 162 – 188. Print.

Debevec Henning, Sylvie. "*La Forme IN-Formante*: A Reconsideration of the Grotesque." *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 14.4 (1981): 107 – 121. Print.

Debord, Guy. "The Society of the Spectacle." *The Visual Culture Reader*. Ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff. 2nd Ed. New York: Routledge, 2006. 142 – 144. Print.

De Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Transl. Steven Rendall. Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1988. Print.

"Declaration of Independence." *National Archives*. N.p. N.d. Web. 5 Sept. 2013. <http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html>

De Genova, Nick. "Gangster Rap and Nihilism in Black America: Some Questions of Life and Death." *Social Text* 43 (Autumn 1995): 89 – 132. Web.

Delanda, Manuel. "Material Expressivity." *Lebbeus Woods*. N.p. 5 Jan. 2009. Web. 27 June 2012. <http://lebbeuswoods.wordpress.com/2009/01/05/manuel-delanda-matters-4>

Delany, Samuel R. "Appendix: Closures and Openings." *Return to Nevèrÿon*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1994. 269 – 291. Print.

----. *Flight from Nevèrÿon*. Return to Nevèrÿon Series, 3. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1994. Print.

----. *Neveryóna*. Return to Nevèrÿon Series, 2. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1993. Print.

----. *Return to Nevèrÿon*. Return to Nevèrÿon Series, 4. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1994. Print.

----. "Sword & Sorcery, S/M, and the Economics of Inadequation: The *Camera Obscura* Interview." *Silent Interviews on Language, Race, Sex, Science Fiction, and Some Comics: A Collection of Written Interviews*. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan UP and UP of New England, 1995. 127 – 163. Print.

----. *Tales of Nevèrÿon*. Return to Nevèrÿon Series, 1. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1993. Print.

----. *The Mad Man*. Rutherford, NJ: Voyant Publishing, 2002. Print.

----. "The Second *Science Fiction* Interview: On *Trouble on Triton* and Other Matters." *Shorter Views: Queer Thoughts & the Politics of the Paraliterary*. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan UP and UP of New England, 1999. 315 – 349. Print.

----. "The Semiology of Silence." *Science Fiction Studies* 14.2 (July 1987): 134 – 164. Web.

----. "The Tale of Gorgik." *Tales of Nevèrÿon*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1993. 25 – 78. Print.

----. "The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals." *Flight from Nevèrÿon*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1994. 181 – 389. Print.

----. "The Thomas L. Long Interview." *Shorter Views: Queer Thoughts & the Politics of the Paraliterary*. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan UP and UP of New England, 1999. 123 – 138. Print.

----. *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*. New York: New York UP, 1999.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Bergsonism*. Transl. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. New York: Zone Books, 1991. Print.

----. *Difference and Repetition*. Transl. Paul Patton. New York: Columbia UP, 1994. Print.

----. *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. Transl. Daniel W. Smith. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2003. Print.

----. *Foucault.* Transl. Seán Hand. New York: Continuum, 2006. Web.

----. *Kant's Critical Philosophy: The Doctrine of the Faculties*. Transl. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. London: The Athlone Press, 1984. Print.

----. *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life*. Transl. Anne Boyman. New York: Zone Books, 2001. Print.

----. *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. Transl. Tom Conley. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993. Print.

----. *The Logic of Sense*. Transl. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale. New York: Columbia UP, 1990. Print.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2003. Print.

----. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Transl. Dana Polan. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986. Print.

Denby, David. "Blowup." *The New Yorker*. Condé Nast Digital. Mar. 20, 2006. Web. Oct. 15, 2010. <http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2006/03/20/060320crci_cinema>

Derrida, Jacques. "Economimesis." *Diacritics* 11.2 (Summer 1981): 2 – 25. Web.

----. "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority.'" *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*. Eds. Drucilla Cornell, Michael Rosenfeld, David Gray Carlson. New York: Routledge, 1992. 3 – 67. Print.

Descartes, René. *Meditations of First Philosophy*. Ed. Stanley Tweyman. New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.

DiSalle, Robert. "Space and Time: Inertial Frames." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2009 Edition). Ed. Edward N. Zalta. 4 Nov. 2009. Web. 6 May 2013. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/spacetime-iframes/>

Eagleton, Terry. *Trouble with Strangers: A Study of Ethics*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blacwell Pub., 2009. Print.

Eaton, George. "How public spending rose under Thatcher." *New Statesman* 8 Apr. 2013. Web. 8 July 2013. <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2013/04/how-public-spending-rose-under-thatcher>

Edgar, David. "Festivals of the Oppressed." *New Formations: A Journal of Culture, Theory & Politics* 3 (Winter 1987): 19 – 32. Web.

Edwards, Justin D. and Rune Graulund. *Grotesque*. New York: Routledge, 2013. Print.

Emilsson, Wilhelm. "Iain Sinclair's Unsound Detectives." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*. 43.3 (2002): 271 – 88. Web.

Farnham, Willard. *The Shakespearean Grotesque: Its Genius and Transformations*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971. Print.

Farnsworth, Rodney. "John Wayne's Epic of Contradictions: The Aesthetic and Rhetoric of War and Diversity in *The Alamo*." *Film Quarterly* 52.2 (Winter 1998): 24 – 34. Web.

Fearnow, Mark. *The American Stage and the Great Depression: A Cultural History of the Grotesque*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1997. Print.

Féral, Josette. "Performance and Theatricality: The Subject Demystified." *Modern Drama* 25.1 (1982): 170 – 181. Print.

Ferguson, Christine. "Victoria-Arcana and the Misogynistic Poetics of Resistance in Iain Sinclair's *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings* and Alan Moore's *From Hell*." *Literature Interpretation Theory* 20.1-2 (2009): 45 – 64. Web.

Fingesten, Peter. "Delimitating the Concept of the Grotesque." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 42.4 (1984): 419 – 426. Web.

Fink, Bruce. *Lacan to the Letter: Reading* Écrits *Closely*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2004. Print.

----. *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and* Jouissance. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995. Print.

Fisher, Mark. "Mama said knock you out." *New Statesman* 6 July 2009. Web. 26 July 2013. <http://www.newstatesman.com/music/2009/07/hip-hop-record-rapper>

Floyd, Kevin. "How to Subsume Difference, or World Reduction in Delany." *Literary Materialisms*. Eds. Mathias Nilges and Emilio Sauri. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 113 – 124. Print.

----. *The Reification of Desire: Toward a Queer Marxism*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2009. Print.

Fokkema, Aleid. "Abandoning the Postmodern? The Case of Peter Ackroyd." *Restant* 21.3 (1993): 167 – 179. Print.

Foltz, Mary Catherine. "The Excremental Ethics of Samuel R. Delany." *SubStance* 37.2 (2008): 41 – 55. Web.

Foucault, Michel. "A Preface to Transgression." *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*. Ed. James D. Faubion. *Essential Works of Foucault 1954 – 1984, Volume 2: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology.* Series Ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: The New Press, 1998. 69 – 87. Print.

----. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Transl. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1995. Print.

----. "'Omnes et Singulatim:' Toward a Critique of Political Reason." *Essential Works of Foucault 1954 – 1984: Volume III: Power*. Ed. by James D. Faubion. New York: The New Press, 2000. 298 – 325. Print.

----. "The Subject and Power." *Essential Works of Foucault 1954 – 1984, Volume III: Power*. Ed. by James D. Faubion. New York: The New Press, 2000. 326 – 348. Print.

Frank, Thomas. "Why Johnny Can't Dissent." *Commodify Your Dissent: Salvos from the Baffler*. Eds. Thomas Frank and Matt Weiland. New York: Norton, 1997. 31 – 45. Print.

Galgan, Wendy. "*Return to Nevèrÿon*: A 'Derridian-esque' Meditation." *Nebula* 2.1 (March 2005): 75 – 84. Web.

Galloway, Alexander R. *Laruelle: Against the Digital*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2014. Print.

Ganim, John M. "Medieval Literature as Monster: The Grotesque before and After Bakhtin." *Exemplaria: A Journal of Theory in Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 7.1 (1995): 27 – 40. Print.

Gayford, Martin. "Friends, soulmates, rivals: the double life of Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud." *Spectator.co.uk*. The Spectator. 14 Dec. 2013. Web. 29 Oct. 2014. <http://www.spectator.co.uk/features/9099562/double-vision-7/>

Gibson, Jeremy and Julian Wolfreys. *Peter Ackroyd: The Ludic and Labyrinthine Text*. New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 2000. Print.

Gilbey, Ryan. "Days of Gloury." *Sight and Sound* 19.9 (Sept. 2009): N.p. Web.

Giroux, Henry A. *Fugitive Cultures: Race, Violence, and Youth*. New York: Routledge, 1996. Web.

Gormley, Paul. *The New-Brutality Film: Race and Affect in Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*. Portland: Intellect Books, 2005. Print.

Gray, Maggie. "'A Fistful of Dead Roses…'. Comics as Cultural Resistance: Alan Moore and David Lloyd's *V for Vendetta*." *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 1.1 (2010): 31 – 49. Web.

Grossman, David. "The Mad Man in the Mask." *TIME.com*. TIME Magazine. 12 Mar. 2006. Web. 15 Oct. 2010. <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1172195,00.html>

Grundmann, Anke. "The Concept of Time in Peter Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor*." Norderstedt, Germany: Books on Demand, 2000. Web.

Haar, Maria. *The Phenomenon of the Grotesque in Modern Southern Fiction: Some Aspects of its Form and Function*. Stockholm, Sweden: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1983. Print.

Hadley, Louisa and Elizabeth Ho. "Introduction: 'The Lady's Not For Turning': New Cultural Perspectives on Thatcher and Thatcherism." *Thatcher and After: Margaret Thatcher and Her Afterlife in Contemporary Culture*. Eds. Louisa Hadley and Elizabeth Ho. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 1 – 26. Web.

Hall, Stuart. "The Great Moving Right Show." *Marxism Today*, Jan. 1979: 14 – 20. Web. 9 July 2013. <http://www.amielandmelburn.org.uk/collections/mt/index_frame.htm>

Hallward, Peter. *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2003. Print.

----. *Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation*. New York: Verso, 2006. Print.

Hames-García, Michael. "Dr. Gonzo's Carnival: The Testimonial Satires of Oscar Zeta Acosta." *American Literature* 72.3 (2000): 463 – 493. Web.

Hanna, Robert. "Kinds of Use: A Supplement to 'Kant's Theory of Judgment.'" *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2011 Edition). Ed. Edward N. Zalta. 23 Apr. 2009. Web. 22 Apr. 2013. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-judgment/supplement1.html> <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-judgment/index.html>

Harman, Chris. *Zombie Capitalism: Global Crisis and the Relevance of Marx*. London: Bookmarks Publications, 2009. Print.

Harpham, Geoffrey Galt. *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature*. Aurora, CO: Davies Group, 2006. Print.

Harpham, Geoffrey. "The Grotesque: First Principles." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 34.4 (1976): 461 – 468. Web.

Harrison, Charles, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger, eds. *Art in Theory, 1648 – 1815: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000. Web.

Hawkins, Stan and Sarah Niblock. *Prince: The Making of a Pop Music Phenomenon*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publshing Company, 2011. Web.

Hebidge, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. New York: Methuen & Co., 1979. Print.

Hegel, G. W. F. *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Vols. I and II. Transl. T. M. Knox. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988. Print.

Heinlein, Robert A. "All You Zombies—." *Science Fiction: A Historical Anthology*. Ed. by Eric S. Rabkin. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983. 402 – 414. Print.

Hellmann, John. "Corporate Fiction, Private Fable, and Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail '72*." *Critique* 21.1 (1979): 16 – 30. Print.

Hervey, Nick. "Gull, Sir William Withey." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004. Online Edition, May 2006. Web. 9 Dec. 2011. <www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/view/article/11730?docPos=1>

Heyes, Cressida. "Identity Politics." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2012 Edition). Ed. Edward N. Zalta. 7 Feb. 2012. Web. 18 June 2013. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-politics/>

Ho, Elizabeth. "Postimperial Landscapes: 'Psychogeography' and Englishness in Alan Moore's Graphic Novel *From Hell: A Melodrama in Sixteen Parts*." *Cultural Critique* 63 (2006): 99 – 121. Web.

Holm, D. K. "Introduction" and "Chronology." *R. Crumb: Conversations*. Ed. D. K. Holm. Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi, 2004. vii – xxi. Print.

Holquist, Michael. "Prologue." *Rabelais and His World*. By Mikhail Bakhtin. Transl. Hélène Iswolsky. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1984. xiii – xxiii. Print.

Hopkins, David. "Introduction." *Neo-Avant-Garde*. Ed. David Hopkins. New York and Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2006. 1 – 16. Print.

Horace. *The Art of Poetry*. Transl. D. A. Russell. *Classical Literary Criticism*. Eds. D. A. Russell and Michael Winterbottom. New York: Oxford UP, 1998. 98 – 110. Print.

Horkheimer, Max and Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr. Transl. Edmund Jephcott. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002. Print.

Houlgate, Stephen. "Hegel's Aesthetics." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2010 Edition). Ed. Edward N. Zalta. 15 Dec. 2009. Web. 17 Jun. 2013. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hegel-aesthetics/>

Howell, Peter. "*Snowpiercer* is hell on wheels and a glorious head trip: review." *The Toronto Star*. 17 July 2014. Web. 9 Jan. 2015. <http://www.thestar.com/entertainment/movies/2014/07/17/snowpiercer_is_hell_on_wheels_and_a_glorious_head_trip_review.html>

"How Evil Are You?" Narr. Eli Roth. *Curiosity*. Discovery Channel. 30 Oct. 2011. Television.

Hugo, Victor. "Preface to *Cromwell*." *Prefaces & Prologues to Famous Books*. The Harvard Classics. Ed. Charles W. Eliot, LL.D. New York: P. F. Collier & Son Corporation, 1909. Print.

Humphrey, Paul. "Metaphysics of Mind: Hylomorphism and Eternality in Aristotle and Hegel." Diss. State University of New York at Stony Brook, 2007. *Google Books*. Web. 8 Dec. 2011.

Ilie, Paul. "Concepts of the Grotesque before Goya." *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*. Ed. Ronald C. Rosbottom. Madison: U of Wisconsin P for American Society of 18th Century Studies, 1976. 185 – 201. Print.

Inglourious Basterds. Dir. Quentin Tarantino. Perf. Brad Pitt, Mélanie Laurent, and Christoph Waltz. Alliance, 2009. Film.

"Interview for *Woman's Own* ("No Such Thing as Society")." *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. N.p. N.d. Web. Dec. 7, 2011. <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106689>

Jameson, Frederic. "First Impressions." Rev. of *The Parallax View*, by Slavoj Žižek. *London Review of Books* 28.17 (7 Sept. 2006): 7 – 8. Web. <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n17/fredric-jameson/first-impressions>

----. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982. Print.

Jennings, Lee Byron. *The Ludicrous Demon: Aspects of the Grotesque in German Post Romantic Prose*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1963. Print.

Jirón-King, Shimberlee. "Thompson's and Acosta's Collaborative Creation of the Gonzo Narrative Style." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 10.1 (March 2008): 1 – 11. Web.

Johnson, Randall. "Editor's Introduction." *The Field of Cultural Production*. By Pierre Bourdieu. New York: Columbia UP, 1993. Print.

Johnston, Adrian. "Jacques Lacan." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2013 Edition). Ed. Edward N. Zalta. 2 Apr. 2013. Web. 5 Sept. 2013. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/lacan/>

----. *Prolegomena to Any Future Materialism. Volume One: The Outcome of Contemporary French Philosophy*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2013. Print.

----. *Žižek's Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2008. Print.

Johnston, Adrian and Catherine Malabou. *Self and Emotional Life: Philosophy, Psychoanalysis, and Neuroscience*. New York: Columbia UP, 2013. Print.

Johnston, Georgia. "From the Margins of Race: Samuel Delany's Sex and Race." *Oxford Literary Review* 25.1 (2003): 219 – 238. Web.

Kane, Sarah. *Blasted*. In *Complete Plays*. London: Methuen Drama, 2001. 1 – 61. Print.

----. *Cleansed*. In *Complete Plays*. London: Methuen Drama, 2001. 105 – 151. Print.

----. *Phaedra's Love*. London: Methuen Drama, 2001. 63 – 103. Print.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Ed. and Transl. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009. Print.

----. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Transl. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews. Ed. Paul Guyer. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006. Print.

Kauffmann, Stanley. "Shooting Up." Rev. of *Pulp Fiction*, dir. Quentin Tarantino. *The New Republic*. N.p. 14 Nov. 1994. Web. 27 Jan. 2011. <http://www.tnr.com/article/film/shooting>

Kavanaugh, Philip R. and Tammy L. Anderson. "Solidarity and Drug Use in the Electronic Dance Music Scene." *The Sociological Quarterly* 49.1 (2008): 181 – 208. Web.

Kawashima, Nobuko. "Planning for Equality? Decentralisation in Cultural Policy." Research Papers. Centre for Cultural Policy Studies, University of Warwick. Eds. Oliver Bennett and Jeremy Ahearne. *Centre for Cultural Policy Studies Publications*, 2004. Web. 5 July 2013. <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/theatre_s/cp/research/publications/centrepubs/ccps_paper_1.pdf>

Kayser, Wolfgang Johannes. *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co, 1966. Print.

Keizer, Arlene R. "'Obsidian Mine': The Psychic Aftermath of Slavery." *American Literary History* 24.4 (2012): 686 – 701. Web.

Keller, James R. V for Vendetta *as Cultural Pastiche: A Critical Study of the Graphic Novel and Film*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008. Print.

Kelso, Sylvia. "'Across Never': Postmodern Theory and Narrative Praxis in Samuel R. Delany's Nevèrÿon Cycle." *Science Fiction Studies* 24.2 (July 1997): 289 – 301. Web.

Kemp, Jonathan. "The Anti-Canon: Samuel R. Delany's *The Mad Man*." *influxpress.com* 30 June 2014. Web. 4 Sept. 2014. <http://www.influxpress.com/the-anti-canon-samuel-r-delaneys-the-mad-man_by-jonathon-kemp>

Kerouac, Jack. "On Spontaneous Prose." *The Portable Jack Kerouac*. New York: Penguin, 1996. 481 – 492. Print.

King, Jr., Martin Luther. "I've Been to the Mountaintop." *A Call to Conscience: The Landmark Speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* Eds. Clayborne Carson and Kris Shepard. New York: Hachette Book Group, 2001. N.p. Web.

Körner, Stephan. *Kant*. New York: Penguin Books, 1987. Print.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Transl. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1982. Print.

Kurlansky, Mark. *1968: The Year That Rocked the World*. New York: Random House, 2005. Web.

Kuryluk, Ewa. *Salome and Judas in the Cave of Sex: The Grotesque: Origins, Iconography, Techniques*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1987. Print.

Lacan, Jacques. "Kant with Sade." Transl. James B. Swenson, Jr. *October* 51 (1989): 55 – 75. Web.

----. "Remarks on Daniel Legache's Presentation: 'Psychoanalysis and Personality Structure.'" *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. Transl. Bruce Fink. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006. 543 – 574. Print.

----. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. 2nd Edition. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch, et al. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010. 1163 – 1169. Print.

Land, Nick. "Art as Insurrection: the Question of Aesthetics in Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche." *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987 – 2007*. Eds. Robin MacKay and Ray Brassier. New York: Sequence Press, 2012. 145 – 174. Print.

----. "Kant, Capital, and the Prohibition of Incest: A Polemical Introduction to the Configuration of Philosophy and Modernity." *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987 – 2007*. Eds. Robin MacKay and Ray Brassier. New York: Sequence Press, 2012. 55 – 80. Print.

----. "Spirit and Teeth." *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987 – 2007*. Eds. Robin MacKay and Ray Brassier. New York: Sequence Press, 2012. 175 – 201. Print.

Laruelle, François. "What Can Non-Philosophy Do?" *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 8.2 (2003): 169 – 189. Web.

Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Transl. Catherine Porter. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993. Print.

Lawlor, Leonard and Valentine Moulard. "Henri Bergson." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2010 Edition). Ed. Edward N. Zalta. 12 Jan. 2010. Web. 1 Nov. 2010. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2010/entries/bergson>

Lee, A Robert. "*Chicanismo*'s Beat Outrider? The Texts and Contexts of Oscar Zeta Acosta." *College Literature* 27.1 (2000): 158 – 176. Web.

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Transl. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2010. Print.

----. *The Urban Revolution*. Transl. Robert Bononno. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2003. Print.

Levitt, Morton P. "James Joyce in London: Peter Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor*." *James Joyce Quarterly* 39.4 (2002): 840 – 843. Web.

Libretti, Tim. "'What a Dirty Way of Getting Clean: The Grotesque in Proletarian Literature." *Literature and the Grotesque*. Ed. Michael J. Meyer. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995. 171 – 193. Print.

Link, Alex. "'The Capitol of Darknesse': Gothic Spatialities in the London of Peter Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor*." *Contemporary Literature* 45.3 (2004): 516 – 537. Print.

Lob, Jacques and Jean-Marc Rochette. *Le Transperceneige*. Tournai, Belgium: Casterman, 1984. Web.

"Local Government Act 1988." *Legislation.gov.uk*. The National Archives. N.d. Web. 14 Oct. 2010. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/9/contents/enacted>

"London Docklands Development Corporation." *Brewer's Dictionary of London Phrase & Fable*. Ed. Russ Willey. *Oxford Reference Online*. Edinburgh: Chambers Harrap Publishers, 2009. Web. 11 July 2013.

Luckhurst, Mary. "Infamy and Dying Young: Sarah Kane, 1971 – 1999." *Theatre and Celebrity in Britain, 1660 – 2000*. Eds. Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody. Blasingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. 107 – 123. Print.

Lynskey, Dorian. "Margaret Thatcher: the villain of political pop." *The Guardian* 8 Apr. 2013. Web. 11 July 2013. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/musicblog/2013/apr/08/margaret-thatcher-pop-rock-music>

Lyotard, Jean-François. "Taking the Side of the Figural." *The Lyotard Reader and Guide*. Eds. Ketih Crome and James Williams. New York: Columbia UP, 2006. Web.

Malabou, Catherine. *Changing Difference: The Feminine and the Question of Philosophy*. Transl. Carolyn Shread. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2011. Print.

----. *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction*. Transl. Carolyn Shread. New York: Columbia UP, 2010. Print.

----. *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*. Transl. Lisabeth During. New York: Routledge, 2005. Print.

----. *The Heidegger Change: On the Fantastic in Philosophy*. Transl. Peter Skafish. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2011. Print.

----. *The New Wounded: From Neurosis to Brain Damage*. Transl. Steven Miller. New York: Fordham UP, 2012. Print.

----. *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* Transl. Sebastian Rand. New York: Fordham UP, 2008. Print.

Mann, Thomas. "Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*." *Past Masters and Other Papers*. Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1968. 231 – 247. Print.

----. *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*. Transl. Walter D. Morris. New York: The Ungar Publishing Company, 1987. Print.

Maudlin, Tim. *The Metaphysics within Physics*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007. Print.

----. "Space, Absolute and Relational." *The Routledge Companion to Metaphysics*. Eds. Robin Le Poidevin, Peter Simons, Andrew McGonigal, and Ross P. Cameron. New York: Routledge, 2009. 420 – 429. Print.

Manzoor, Sarfraz. "Margaret Thatcher: the creative catalyst for a generation." *The Telegraph* 14 Apr. 2013. Web. 6 July 2013.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/9991199/Margaret-Thatcher-the-creative-catalyst-for-a-generation.html>

Marcus, Greil. *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1990. Print.

"Margaret Thatcher: Acceptable in the 80s?" *The Guardian* 11 Apr. 2009. Web. 7 July 2013. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/apr/11/thatcher-and-the-arts>

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Ed. Robert C. Tucker. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978. 469 – 500. Print.

Massumi, Brian. *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992. Print.

----. "Navigating Movements: A Conversation with Brian Massumi." *Hope: New Philosophies for Change* by Mary Zournazi. New York: Routledge, 2003. 210 – 243. Web.

----. "Translator's Foreword." *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2003. ix – xv. Print.

McCarthy, Todd. Rev. of *Reservoir Dogs*, dir. Quentin Tarantino. *Variety*. Reed Elsevier Inc. 26 Jan. 1992. Web. 27 Jan. 2011. <http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117794411?refcatid=31>

McCaw, Neil. *Adapting Detective Fiction: Crime, Englishness, and the TV Detectives*. New York: Continuum, 2011. Web.

McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1994. Print.

McClure, Bruce David. "Between the Seen and the Said: Deleuze-Guattari's Pragmatics of the Order-Word." Diss. University of Warwick, 2001. *Cinestatic Research*. Web. 18 July 2012. <http://www.cinestatic.com/trans-mat/McClure/contents.htm>

McElroy, Bernard. *Fiction of the Modern Grotesque*. New York: St. Martin, 1989. Print.

McLaughlin, Brian and Karen Bennett. "Supervenience." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2011 Edition). Ed. Edward N. Zalta. 2 Nov. 2011. Web. 2 May 2013. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/supervenience>

McPherson, Heather. "Ingres and the Poetics of the Grotesque." *Modern Art and the Grotesque*. Ed. Frances S. Connelly. New York: Cambridge UP, 2003. 139 – 155. Print.

Meacher, Colette. "Breaking the Skin of Things: Iain Sinclair talks to Colette Meacher about Joycean epiphany, being held at gunpoint, the trashed sublime, narrative leaps, writing things into being, and punk transcendence." *Literary London: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Representation of London* 3.2 (2005): n.p. Web.

Meillassoux, Quentin. *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. Transl. Ray Brassier. London, UK: Continuum, 2008.

Meindl, Dieter. *American Fiction and the Metaphysics of the Grotesque*. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1996. Print.

Meinhof, Ulrike H. and Jonathan Smith. "*Spitting Image*: TV genre and Intertextuality." *Intertextuality and the Media: From Genre to Everyday Life*. Eds. Ulrike H. Meinhof and Jonathan Smith. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000. 43 – 60. Web.

Mendoza, Louis. "On Buffaloes, Body Snatching, and Bandidismo: Ilan Stavans's Appropriation of Oscar Acosta and the Chicano Experience." *Bilingual Review* 26.1 (2001): 79 – 86. Web.

Mennekes, Friedhelm. "Francis Bacon: Time Does Not Heal." *artandreligion.de*. N.p. N.d. Web. 29 Oct. 2014. <http://www.artandreligion.de/index.php?idcatside=52>

Menninghaus, Winfried. *Disgust: Theory and History of a Strong Sensation*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2003. Print.

Metzinger, Thomas. *Being No One: The Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003. Print.

----. *The Ego Tunnel: The Science of the Mind and the Myth of the Self*. New York: Basic Books, 2009. Print.

Micallef, Shawn. *Stroll: Psychogeographic Walking Tours of Toronto*. With illustrations by Marlena Zuber. Toronto: Coach House Books, 2012. Print.

Miller, Jacques-Alain. "Another Lacan." *Lacan.com*. N.p. N.d. Web. 20 Oct. 2010. <http://www.lacan.com/thesymptom/?p=1>

Mitchell, Lee Clark. *Westerns: Making the Man in Fiction and Film*. Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 1996. Print.

Mitchell, W. J. T. and Art Spiegleman. "Public Conversation: What the %$#! Happened to Comics?" *Critical Inquiry* 40.3 (Spring 2014): 20 – 35. Web.

Moore, Alan and David Lloyd. *V for Vendetta*. New York: DC Comics, 2005.

Moore, Alan and Eddie Campbell. *From Hell: Being a Melodrama in Sixteen Parts*. Marietta, GA: Top Shelf Productions, 2004. Print.

Morgan, Ann Lee. "Andy Warhol." *The Oxford Dictionary of American Art and Artists*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007. 504 – 505. Print.

----. "Neoclassicism." *The Oxford Dictionary of American Art and Artists*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007. 336 – 337. Print.

Morley, Jonathan. "Rock Against Racism." *The Oxford Companion to Black British History*. Eds. David Daybeen, John Gilmore, and Cecily Jones. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007. Oxford Reference Online. N.d. Web. 26 July 2013.

----. "Two Tone." *The Oxford Companion to Black British History*. Eds. David Daybeen, John Gilmore, and Cecily Jones. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007. Oxford Reference Online. N.d. Web. 26 July 2013.

Mueller, Charles. "Gothicism and English Goth Music: Notes on the Repertoire." *Gothic Studies* 14.2 (2012): 74 – 88. Web.

Mullarkey, John. *Post-Continental Philosophy: An Outline*. New York: Continuum, 2006. Print.

Mullarkey, John and Anthony Paul Smith. "Introduction: The Non-Philosophical Inversion: Laruelle's Knowledge Without Domination." *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy*. Eds. John Mullarkey and Anthony Paul Smith. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2012. 1 – 18. Print.

Murphy, Richard. *Theorizing the Avant-Garde*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999. Print.

Murray, Alex. *Recalling London: Literature and History in the Works of Peter Ackroyd and Iain Sinclair*. New York: Continuum, 2007. Print.

Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Speculative Remark (One of Hegel's* Bons Mots*)*. Transl. Céline Surprenant. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001. Web.

Natoli, Joseph. "The Deep Morals of *Inglourious Basterds*." *Senses of Cinema* 52 (2009): N.p. Web.

Nehring, Neil. "'Everyone's Given Up and Just Wants to Go Dancing': From Punk to Rave in the Thatcher Era." *Popular Music and Society* 30.1 (2007): 1 – 18. Web.

Newman, Robert. "(Re)Imaging the Grotesque: Francis Bacon's Crucifixion Triptychs." *The Image in Dispute: Art and Cinema in the Age of Photography*. Ed. Dudley Andrew. Austin: U of Texas P, 1997. 205 – 222. Print.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. 2nd Edition. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch, et al. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010. 764 – 774. Print.

----. *The Antichrist*. In *The Portable Nietzsche*. Ed. and transl. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Viking Press, 1962. 565 – 656. Print.

----. *The Birth of Tragedy*. In *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Ed. and transl. Walter Kaufmann. New York: The Modern Library, 2000. 1 – 144. Print.

----. *Twilight of the Idols*. In *The Portable Nietzsche*. Ed. and transl. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Viking Press, 1962. 463 – 563. Print.

Night of the Living Dead. Dir. George A. Romero. Perf. Duane Jones and Judith O'Dea. Image Ten Production, 1968. Film.

Noble, Denis. "We are still saving British science from Margaret Thatcher." *Nature* 17 Apr. 2013. Web. 8 July 2013. <http://www.nature.com/news/we-are-still-saving-british-science-from-margaret-thatcher-1.12800>

Nunn, Heather. *Thatcher, Politics and Fantasy: The Political Culture of Gender and Nation*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2002. Print.

O'Brien Johnson, Toni. *Synge: The Medieval and the Grotesque*. Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1982. Print.

O'Connor, William Van. *The Grotesque: An American Genre, and Other Essays*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1962. Print.

Onega, Susana. *Metafiction and Myth in the Novels of Peter Ackroyd*. Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1999. Print.

Peacock, D. Keith. *Thatcher's Theatre: British Theatre and Drama in the Eighties*. Westport, CT: Greendwood Press, 1999. Web.

Penrose, Roger. *The Road to Reality: A Complete Guide to the Laws of the Universe*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005. Print.

Poggioli, Renato. *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Transl. Gerald Fitzgerald. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1968. Print.

Prunet, Monique. "The Outrageous 80s: Conservative Policies and the Church of England Under Fire in Steven Berkoff's *Sink the Belgrano* and David Hare's *The Secret Rapture* and *Racing Demon*." *Contemporary Theatre Review* 5.1 (1996): 91 – 102. Web.

Pulver, Andrew. "*Snowpiercer*: first look review – something of absurdist theatre, Terry Gilliam meets Samuel Beckett." *The Guardian*. 20 June 2014. Web. 9 Jan. 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/jun/20/snowpiercer-first-look-review-edinburgh-2014>

Ranc, Gaëlle. "The Notion of Cruelty in the Work of Sarah Kane." *Sarah Kane*. N.p. n.d. Web. 28 Feb. 2011. <http://www.iainfisher.com/kane/eng/sarah-kane-study-gr.html>

Rancière, Jacques. *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*. Transl. Julie Rose. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1998. Print.

----. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. Ed. and Transl. Steven Corcoran. New York: Continuum, 2010. Print.

----. "Is There a Deleuzian Aesthetics?" *Qui Parle?* 14.2 (2004): 1 – 14. Print.

----. *The Politics of Literature*. Transl. Julie Rose. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011.

Reading, Bill. *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics*. New York: Routledge, 1991. Web.

Redding, Arthur. *Haints: American Ghosts, Millennial Passions, and Contemporary Gothic Fictions*. Tuscaloosa: The U of Alabama P, 2011. Print.

----. Message to the author. 18 Dec. 2013. E-mail.

Redmon, Allen H. "'The Unfinished Business' of *Kill Bill*: Cinematic Discourse In and Out of the Dark." *Journal of Religion and Film* 11.1 (2007): n.p. Web.

Rehling, Nicola. *Extra-Ordinary Men: White Heterosexual Masculinity in Contemporary Popular Cinema*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009. Print.

Reinelt, Janelle and Gerald Hewitt. *The Political Theatre of David Edgar: Negotiation and Retrieval*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2011. Web.

Remshardt, Ralf. *Staging the Savage God: The Grotesque in Performance*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004. Print.

Rhodes, Neil. *Elizabethan Grotesque*. London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1980. Print.

Rieder, John. "Race and Revenge Fantasies in *Avatar*, *District 9* and *Inglourious Basterds*." *Science Fiction Film and Television* 4.1 (Spring 2011): 41 – 56. Web.

Rodríguez, Joe D. "Oscar Zeta Acosta." *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol. 82: Chicano Writers*. Eds. Francisco A. Lomelí and Carl R. Shirley. Detroit: Gale Research, 1989. 3 – 10. Print.

Rose, Jacqueline. "Margaret Thatcher and Ruth Ellis." *New Formations* 6 (Winter 1988): 3 – 29. Web.

Ruskin, John. *Stones of Venice, Volume III: The Fall*. New York: Cosimo, 2007. Web.

Russo, Mary J. *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess, and Modernity*. New York: Routledge, 1995. Print.

Sánchez, Marta E. *"Shakin' Up" Race and Gender: Intercultural Connections in Puerto Rican, African American, and Chicano Narratives and Culture (1965 – 1995)*. Austin: U of Texas P, 2005. Print.

Saunders, Graham. *'Love Me or Kill Me': Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*. Manchester, UK: Manchester UP, 2002. Print.

Savage, John. *England's Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock, and Beyond*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2001. Print.

Savitt, Steven. "Being and Becoming in Modern Physics." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2008 Edition). Ed. Edward N. Zalta. 5 Sept. 2006. Web. 2 May 2013. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/spacetime-bebecome>

Sclavi, Tiziano and Angelo Stano. *Dylan Dog: Morgana*. Transl. Violeta Jurkovic. Milwaukie, OR: Dark Horse Comics, 1999. Print.

Scott, Darieck. "Delany's Divinities." *American Literary History* 24.4 (2012): 702 – 722. Web.

----. *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination*. New York: New York UP, 2010. Print.

Sellar, Tom. "Truth and Dare: Sarah Kane's *Blasted*." *Theater* 27.1 (1996): 29 – 34. Print.

Shaviro, Steve. "Capitalist Monsters." *Historical Materialism* 10.4 (2002): 281 – 290. Web.

----. "The Mad Man." *The Pinocchio Theory* 30 Nov. 2006. Web. 9 Sept. 2014. <http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=528>

----. *The Universe of Things: On Speculative Realism*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2014. Print.

----. *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Aesthetics*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009. Print.

Sheridan, Alan. "Translator's Note." *Écrits: A Selection* by Jacques Lacan. Transl. Alan Sheridan. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977. vii – xii. Print.

Sierz, Aleks. "Cool Britannia? 'In-Yer-Face' Writing in the British Theatre Today." *New Theatre Quarterly* 14.4 (Nov. 1998): 324 – 333. Print.

----. *In-yer-face Theatre: British Drama Today*. London, UK: Faber and Faber, 2001. Print.

----. "Sarah Kane." *Inyerface-theatre.com*. N.p. N.d. Web. 17 Feb. 2011. <http://www.inyerface-theatre.com/archive7.html>

Sinclair, Iain. *Lights out for the Territory: 9 Excursions in the Secret History of London*. With illustrations by Marc Atkins. London: Granta Books, 2007. Print.

----. *Slow Chocolate Autopsy: Incidents from the Notorious Career of Norton, Prisoner of London*. Illustrated by Dave McKean. London: Phoenix House, 1997. Print.

----. *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings*. New York: Penguin Books, 2004. Print.

Singer, Felix. "Kierkegaard *avec* Tarantino: Notes on Repetition in *Death Proof*." *Velox: Critical Approaches to Contemporary Film* 1.1 (2007): 7 – 15. Web.

Smith, Daniel W. "Translator's Introduction: Deleuze on Bacon: Three Conceptual Trajectories in *The Logic of Sensation*." *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. By Gilles Deleuze. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2003. vii – xxvii. Print.

Snowpiercer. Dir. Joon-ho Bong. Perf. Chris Evans, Kang-ho Song, and John Hurt. Anchor Bay Entertainment, 2014. Film.

Spencer, Kathleen L. "Deconstructing *Tales of Nevèrÿon*: Delany, Derrida, and the 'Modular Calculus, Parts I – IV.'" *Essays in Arts and Sciences* 14 (May 1985): 59 – 89. Web.

"Spitting Image." Narr. Doon Mackichan. *Comedy Connections*. BBC One. 28 Feb. 2005. Television.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Translator's Preface." *Of Grammatology* by Jacques Derrida. Transl. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1997. ix – lxxxvii. Print.

Stallybrass, Peter and Allon White. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986. Print.

Stechow, Wolfgang. "Hieronymus Bosch: The Grotesque and We." *The Grotesque in Art and Literature: Theological Reflections*. Eds. James Luther Adams and Wilson Yates. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1997. 113 – 124. Print.

Steig, Michael. "Refining the Grotesque: An Attempt at Synthesis." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 29.2 (1970): 253 – 260. Web.

"Sublime." *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*. Simon Blackburn. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. *Oxford Reference Online*. Web. 9 Nov. 2011.

Swain, Virginia E. *Grotesque Figures: Baudelaire, Rousseau, and the Aesthetics of Modernity*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2004. Print.

Tantimedh, Adi. "Alan Moore Speaks Watchmen 2 with Adi Tantimedh." *Bleeding Cool*. N.p. N.d. Web. 15 Oct. 2010. <http://www.bleedingcool.com/2010/09/09/alan-moore-speaks-watchmen-2-to-adi-tantimedh>

Tarantino, Quentin. *Inglourious Basterds* [The Screenplay]. *Twcawards.com*. The Weinstein Company. N.d. Web. Feb. 3, 2011. <http://twcawards.com/assets/downloads/pdf/Inglourious_screenplay.pdf>

----. "Interview [Track One]." *The Tarantino Connection*. MCA Records, 1996. CD.

----. *Reservoir Dogs* [The Screenplay]. New York: Grove Press, 2000. Print.

Tarantino, Quentin and Roger Avary. *Pulp Fiction* [The Screenplay]. *The Internet Movie Script Database (IMSDb)*. N.d. Web. 27 June 2013. <http://www.imsdb.com/scripts/Pulp-Fiction.html>

Tarleton, John. "Interview: Naomi Klein Breaks a Taboo." *The Indypendent*. N.p. 12 Sept. 2014. Web. 7 Jan. 2015. <https://indypendent.org/2014/09/12/interview-naomi-klein-breaks-taboo>

Thacker, Eugene. *After-Life*. Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 2010. Print.

Rev. of *That Summer*, by David Edgar. BBC Radio 7, 14 Nov. 2009. *Radio Drama Reviews Online*. N.d. Web. 11 July 2013. <http://www.radiodramareviews.com/id365.html>

The Alamo. Dir. John Wayne. Perf. John Wayne, Richard Widmark, and Laurence Harvey. United Artists, 1960. Film.

The Complete Crumb Comics, Vol. 7: Hot 'N' Heavy (1970 – 71). Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics, 1991. Print.

The Last of Us. Dir. Neil Druckmann and Bruce Straley. Perf. Ashley Johnson and Troy Baker. Naughty Dog, 2013. Video game.

Thompson, G. R. "Interdisciplinarity and Romantic Narrative: Analogues of the Visual Arts in the Literature of the Grotesque, Gothic, and Arabesque." *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 49 (2001): 101 – 138. Print.

Thompson, Hunter S. "Chicago – Summer of '68." *Fear and Loathing in America: The Brutal Odyssey of an Outlaw Journalist*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2000. N.p. Web.

----. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream*. New York: Vintage Books, 1998. Print.

----. "He Was a Crook." *The Atlantic* 17 June 1994. Web. 5 Sept. 2013. <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1994/07/he-was-a-crook/308699/>

----. "Introduction." *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* by Oscar Zeta Acosta. New York: Vintage Books, 1989. Print.

----. "Running for Sheriff: Aspen 1970." *Kingdom of Fear: Loathsome Secrets of a Star-Crossed Child in the Final Days of the American Century*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2003. 71 – 96. Web.

----. "The Banshee Screams for Buffalo Meat." *The Great Shark Hunt.* In *The Gonzo Papers Anthology*. London, UK: Picador, 2009. 514 – 534. Print.

Thomson, David. "'Snowpiercer' is a Post-Apocalytpic Action Movie that's Actually Fun." *New Republic*. 24 June 2014. Web. 9 Jan. 2015. <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/118322/snowpiercer-review-joon-ho-bongs-exuberant-disaster-film>

Thomson, Philip. *The Grotesque*. London: Methuen, 1972. Print.

Tinker, Emma. "Identity and Form in Alternative Comics, 1967 – 2007." Diss. University College, London, 2009. Web. 26 Oct. 2010. <http://emmatinker.oxalto.co.uk/thesis>

Trilling, Daniel. "Maggie's playlist: the soundtrack to a decade of dissent." *New Statesman* 2 March 2009. Web. 25 July 2013. <http://www.newstatesman.com/music/2009/02/thatcher-band-decade-song>

True Romance. Dir. Tony Scott. Screenplay by Quentin Tarantino. Perf. Christian Slater, Patricia Arquette, and Dennis Hopper. Warner Home Video, 2002. Film.

Turner, Lauren. "Anti-Thatcher song 'Ding Dong the Witch is Dead' misses top spot in Radio 1 charts." *The Independent* 14 Apr. 2013. Web. 7 July 2013. <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/news/antithatcher-song-ding-dong-the-witch-is-dead-misses-top-spot-in-radio-1-charts-8572547.html>

"TV Interview for London Weekend Television *Weekend World* ("Victorian Values")." *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*. N.p. N.d. Web. Nov. 8, 2011. <www.margaretthatcher.org/speeches/displaydocument.asp?docid=105087>

Twohill, Timothy. "Flimsy Masks and Tortured Souls: Luigi Pirandello and the Grotesque." *Literature and the Grotesque*. Ed. Michael J. Meyer. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995. 85 – 98. Print.

UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force. "First Report of the Working Group on Radicalisation and Extremism that Lead to Terrorism: Inventory of State Programmes." *UN Action to Counter Terrorism*. UN Web Services. N.d. Web. 15 Oct. 2010. <http://www.un.org/terrorism/pdfs/radicalization.pdf>

Unger, Debi and Irwin Unger. "Introduction." *The Times Were a Changin'*. Ed. Debi Unger and Irwin Unger. New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998. Web.

Urban, Ken. "An Ethics of Catastrophe: The Theatre of Sarah Kane." *A Journal of Performance and Art* 23.3 (2001): 36 – 46. Web.

----. "The Body's Cruel Joke: The Comic Theatre of Sarah Kane." *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British and Irish Drama*. Eds. Nadine Holdsworth and Mary Luckhurst. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008. Print.

Uruburu, Paula M. *The Gruesome Doorway: An Analysis of the American Grotesque*. New York: P. Lang, 1987. Print.

US Dept. of State. "The Terrorist Enemy." *US Department of State.* Bureau of Public Affairs. N.d. Web. 15 Oct. 2010. <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/enemy/index.htm>

van Alphen, Ernst. *Francis Bacon and the Loss of Self*. London, UK: Reaktion Books Limited, 1998. Web.

van der Berg, Hubert. "On the Historiographic Distinction between Historical and Neo-Avant-Garde." *Avant-Garde/Neo-Avant-Garde*. Ed. Dietrich Scheunemann. New York and Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2005. 63 – 74. Print.

Wallace, Clare. *Suspect Cultures: Narrative, Identity & Citation in 1990s New Drama*. Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2006. Print.

Walters, Ben. "Debating *Inglourious Basterds*." *Film Quarterly* 63.2 (Winter 2009 – 2010): 19 – 22. Web.

Waters, Steve. "Sarah Kane: From Terror to Trauma." *A Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama, 1880 – 2005*. Ed. Mary Luckhurst. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006. 371 – 382. Print.

Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Routledge, 2001. Print.

Wilentz, Amy. "A Zombie Is a Slave Forever." *The New York Times*. 30 Oct. 2012. Web. 11 Mar. 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/31/opinion/a-zombie-is-a-slave-forever.html>

Williams, David. "Wilgefortis, Patron Saint of Monsters, and the Sacred Language of the Grotesque." *The Scope of the Fantastic: Culture, Biography, Themes, Children's Literature: Selected Essays From the First International Conference on the Fantastic in Literature and Film*. Eds. Robert A. Collins and Howard D. Pearce. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1985. 171 – 177. Print.

Winckelmann, Johann Joachim. *Essays on the Philosophy and History of Art*. Transl. Henry Fuseli and Curtis Bowman. Vol. 1. New York: Continuum, 2005. Web.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Transl. G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968. Print.

----. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Transl. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness. New York: Routledge, 2001. Print.

Wixson, Christopher. "'In Better Places': Space, Identity, and Alienation in Sarah Kane's *Blasted*." *Comparative Drama* 39.1 (2005): 75 – 91. Web.

Wolfreys, Julian. "Londonography: Iain Sinclair's Urban Graphic." *Literary London: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Representation of London* 3.2 (2005): n.p. Web.

----. *Writing London, Volume 3: Inventions of the City*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Print.

Wood, Gaby. "A walk on the wild side in 70s New York." *The Guardian* 3 Jan. 2010. Web. 4 Sept. 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2010/jan/03/edmund-white-city-boy-extracts>

Wright, Greg. "The Literary, Political, and Legal Strategies of Oscar Zeta Acosta and Hunter S. Thompson: Intertextuality, Ambiguity, and (Naturally) Fear and Loathing." *The Journal of Popular Culture* 43.4 (2010): 622 – 643. Web.

Wright, Thomas. *A History of Caricature and Grotesque in Literature and Art*. Ed. F. W. Fairholt. London: Chatto and Windus, 1875. Print.

Yates, Wilson. "Francis Bacon: The Iconography of Crucifixion, Grotesque Imagery, and Religious Meaning." *The Grotesque in Art and Literature: Theological Reflections*. Eds. James Luther Adams and Wilson Yates. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1997. 143 – 192. Print.

Young, Scott. *Home for Christmas and Other Stories*. Toronto: Young & Hogan Book for Macmillan of Canada, 1989. Web.

Zuidervaart, Lambert. "Theodor W. Adorno." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2011 Edition). Ed. Edward N. Zalta. 10 Oct. 2011. Web. 23 May 2013. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/adorno/>

Zupančič, Alenka. *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*. New York: Verso Books, 2000. Print.

Žižek, Slavoj. "Connections of the Freudian Field to Philosophy and Popular Culture." *Interrogating the Real*. Eds. Rex Butler and Scott Stephens. New York: Continuum, 2006. 56 – 81. Print.

----. *How to Read Lacan*. lacan.com, 1997/2007. Web. 11 Apr. 2013. <http://www.lacan.com/zizhowto.html>

----. *In Defense of Lost Causes*. New York: Verso, 2009. Print.

----. "Kant and Sade: The Ideal Couple." *The European Graduate School*. Web. 9 Sept. 2014. <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/slavoj-zizek/articles/kant-and-sade-the-ideal-couple/>

----. *Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*. New York: Verso Books, 2013. Print.

----. *Living in the End Times*. New York: Verso, 2010. Print.

----. *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992. Print.

----. "Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism." *New Left Review* I/225 (Sept. – Oct. 1997): 28 – 51. Web.

----. *Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.

----. "Psychoanalysis in Post-Marxism: The Case of Alain Badiou." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 97.2 (Spring 1998): 235 – 261. Web.

----. "The Ambiguous Legacy of '68." *In These Times* 20 June 2008. Web. 5 Sept. 2013. <http://inthesetimes.com/article/3751/the_ambiguous_legacy_of_68>

----. *The Parallax View*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009. Print.

----. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso, 1989. Print.

----. *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*. New York: Verso, 2008. Print.

----. "You May!" *The London Review of Books* 21.6 (18 Mar. 1999): 3 – 6. Web. <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v21/n06/slavoj-zizek/you-may>

Žižek, Slavoj, perf. *The Examined Life*. Dir. Astra Taylor. National Film Board of Canada, 2010. Film.

----. *The Reality of the Virtual*. Dir. Ben Wright. Olive Films, 2004. Film.